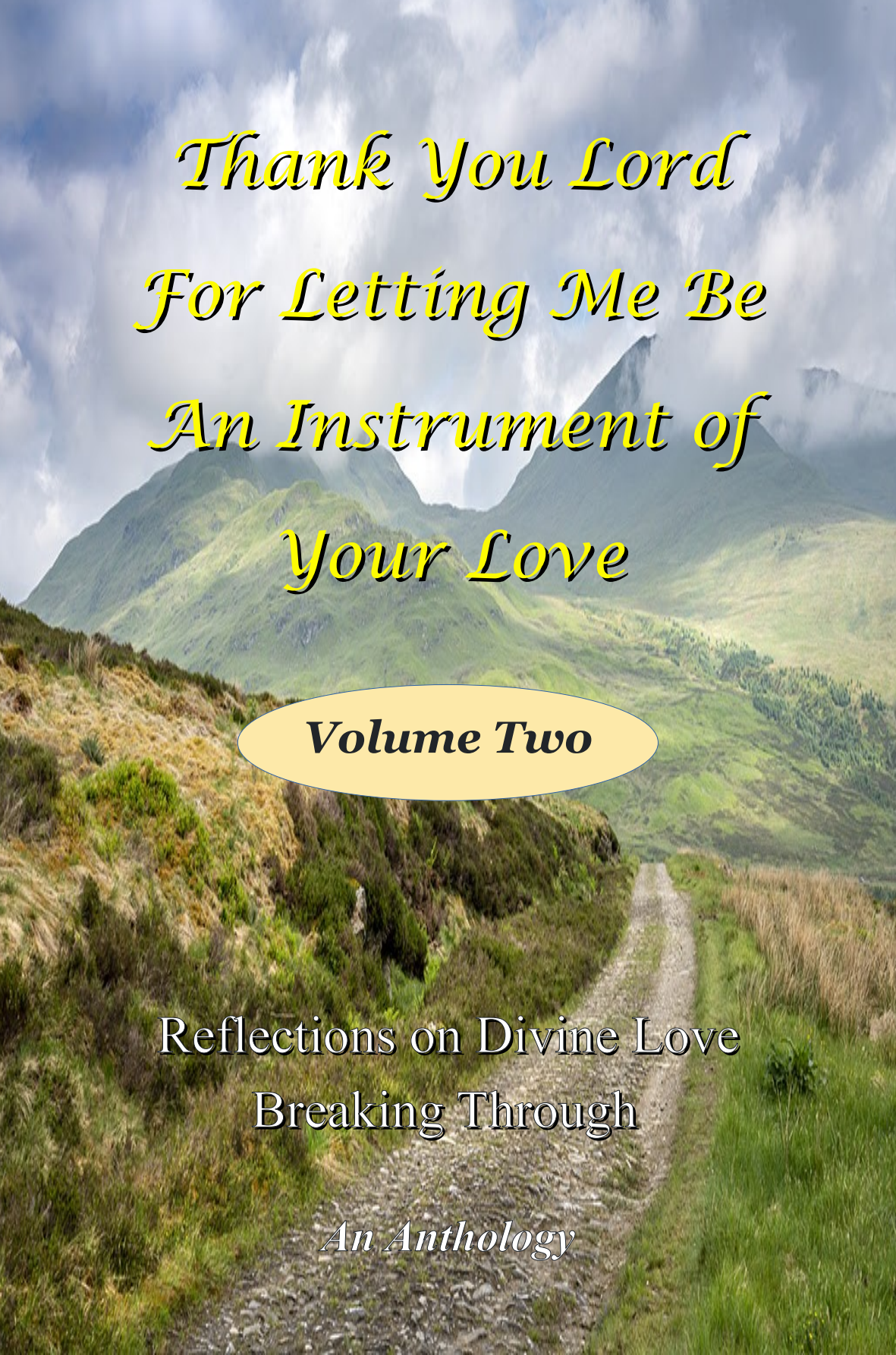
Thank You Lord
For Letting Me Be
An Instrument of
Your Love
Volume Two
Reflections on Divine Love
Breaking Through
An Anthology

NOT FOR SALE

A Free Gift to All Who Find This Writing Inspiring

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Thank You Lord For Letting Me Be An Instrument of Your Love

Volume Two

Reflections on Divine Love Breaking Through

An Anthology

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Forward

The following review of Volume One is included here to share the of the spirit of this series.

Reflections on Divine Love Breaking Through: A Journey of Spiritual Awakening

I recently had the privilege of immersing myself in the profound pages of *Thank You Lord for Letting Me Be an Instrument of Your Love: Reflections on Divine Love Breaking Through—An Anthology,* and I am compelled to express my deepest appreciation for this transformative work. Curated with a rare combination of insight, compassion, and wisdom, this book is a beacon of light in a world often overshadowed by doubt and darkness.

From the outset, it's clear that the editor's selection of content stems from a profound well of personal spiritual depth and experience. Every page resonates with a tangible reverence and profound awe for the Divine, beckoning readers to embark on a journey of self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. One of the most compelling aspects of this book is its exploration of the nature of Divine Love. Through thoughtful reflections, heartfelt anecdotes, and profound insights, the various authors lead readers to a deeper understanding of the boundless love that permeates the universe.

Whether discussing the power of forgiveness, the beauty of surrender, or the transformative nature of grace, each chapter resonates with a profound sense of truth and authenticity. Furthermore, *Reflections on Divine Love Breaking Through* functions as a pragmatic road-map for nurturing a profound connection with the Divine amidst the fabric of daily existence. It extends an earnest invitation to engage in self-inquiry, offering meditations, and exercises meticulously crafted to foster mindfulness, compassion, and a receptive heart to embrace the life-changing influence of Divine Love.

What sets this book apart is its ability to transcend religious and cultural boundaries, speaking directly to the universal longing for connection and meaning. Regardless of one's spiritual background or beliefs, the messages contained within these pages are universally relevant and deeply resonant.

In conclusion, *Reflections on Divine Love Breaking Through* is a true masterpiece of spiritual literature. It is a book that has the power to uplift, inspire, and transform the lives of all who encounter it. I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone seeking a deeper connection with the Divine and a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their lives.

May 10, 2024
With gratitude
Alison Da Silva
Mental Health Counselor,
Writer, and Energy Healer

Introduction

Last year I felt moved to put together the first volume of *Thank You Lord For Letting Me Be An Instrument of Your Love: Reflections on Divine Love Breaking Through.* Unfortunately, though it was submitted to a dozen publishers, none were interested. So I have been sharing it online and with friends, and if you wish, I will be happy to send you a "proof" paperback copy for the cost of printing and postage—just ask.

Since the first volume became available, I have accumulated enough additional material for this second volume. I hope you find these writings supportive as we navigate these challenging times.

This book cannot be published since permissions from all the copyright holders have not yet been received. But this preview edition is available online and as a downloadable PDF file to share with kindred spirits. As I do not have much of an internet presence, it would be a blessing if you can let folks know of this free gift on your social media, websites, blogs, etc.

Please let me know your thoughts on the books in this series and how they are supporting your spiritual growth.

Namaste (The Divinity in me bows to the Divinity in you.)

dan
July 1, 2025
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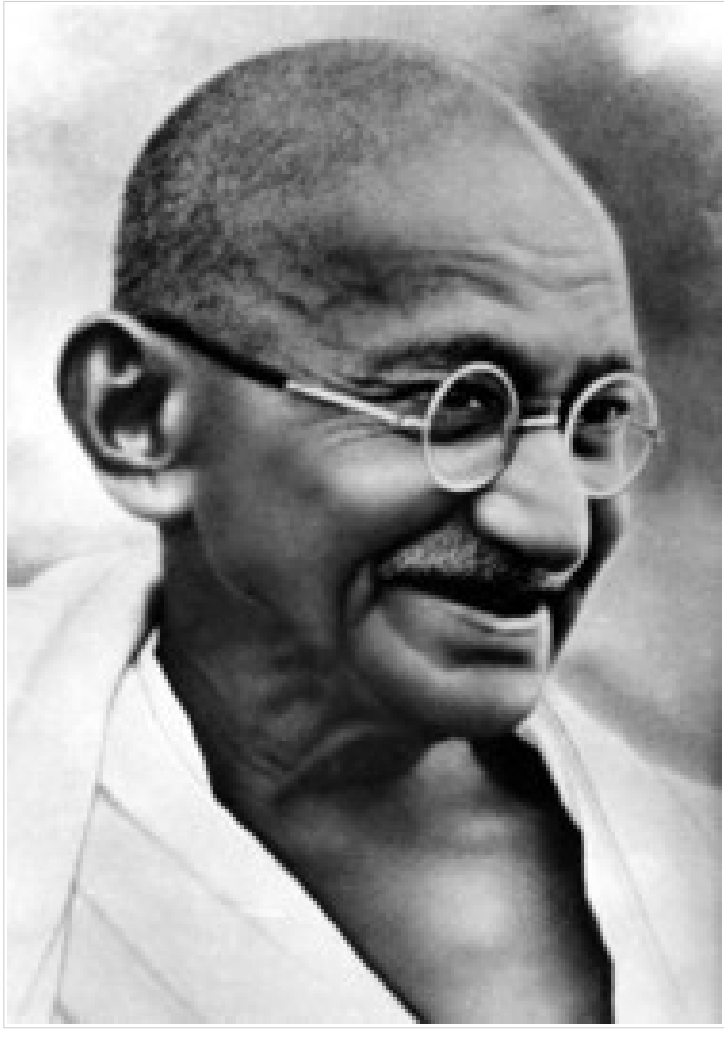

Chapter One

Gandhi's Ten Rules for Changing the World

By Henrik Edber

"You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty."

"The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problem."

"If I had no sense of humor, I would long ago have committed suicide."

Mahatma Gandhi needs no long introduction. Everyone knows about the man who lead the Indian people to independence from British rule in 1947. So let's just move on to some of my favorite tips from Mahatma Gandhi.

1. Change yourself.

"You must be the change you want to see in the world."

"As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world – that is the myth of the atomic age – as in being able to remake ourselves."

If you change yourself you will change your world. If you change how you think then you will change how you feel and what actions you take. And so the world around you will change. Not only because you are now viewing your environment through new lenses of thoughts and emotions but also because the change within can allow you to take action in ways you wouldn't have—or maybe even have thought about—while stuck in your old thought patterns.

And the problem with changing your outer world without changing yourself is that you will still be you when you reach that change you have strived for. You will still have your flaws, anger, negativity, self-sabotaging tendencies etc. intact.

And so in this new situation you will still not find what you hoped for since your mind is still seeping with that negative stuff. And if you get more without having some insight into and distance from your ego it may grow more powerful. Since your ego loves to divide things, to find enemies and to create separation it may start to try to create even more problems and conflicts in your life and world.

2. You are in control.

"Nobody can hurt me without my permission."

What you feel and how you react to something is always up to you. There may be a "normal" or a common way to react to different things. But that's mostly just all it is.

You can choose your own thoughts, reactions and emotions to pretty much everything. You don't have to freak out, overreact of even react in a negative way. Perhaps not every time or instantly. Sometimes a knee-jerk reaction just goes off. Or an old thought habit kicks in.

And as you realize that no-one outside of yourself can actually control how you feel you can start to incorporate this thinking into your daily life and develop it as a thought habit. A habit that you can grow stronger and stronger over time. Doing this makes life a whole lot easier and more pleasurable.

3. Forgive and let it go.

"The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."

"An eye for eye only ends up making the whole world blind."

Fighting evil with evil won't help anyone. And as said in the previous tip, you always choose how to react to something. When you can incorporate such a thought habit more and more into your life then you can react in a way that is more useful to you and others.

You realize that forgiving and letting go of the past will do you and the people in your world a great service. And spending your time in some negative memory won't help you after you have learned the lessons you can learn from that experience. You'll probably just cause yourself more suffering and paralyze yourself from taking action in this present moment.

If you don't forgive then you let the past and another person to control how you feel. By forgiving you release yourself from those bonds. And then you can focus totally on, for instance, the next point.

4. Without action you aren't going anywhere.

"An ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching."

Without taking action very little will be done. However, taking action can be hard and difficult. There can be much inner resistance.

And so you may resort to preaching, as Gandhi says. Or reading and studying endlessly. And feeling like you are moving forward. But getting little or no practical results in real life.

So, to really get where you want to go and to really understand yourself and your world you need to practice. Books can mostly just bring you knowledge. You have to take action and translate that knowledge into results and understanding.

5. Take care of this moment.

"I do not want to foresee the future. I am concerned with taking care of the present. God has given me no control over the moment following."

The best way that I have found to overcome the inner resistance that often stops us from taking action is to stay in the present as much as possible and to be accepting.

Why? Well, when you are in the present moment you don't worry about the next moment that you can't control anyway. And the resistance to action that comes from you imagining negative future consequences—or reflecting on past failures—of your actions loses its power. And so it becomes easier to both take action and to keep your focus on this moment and perform better.

Remember that reconnecting with and staying in the now is a mental habit—a sort of muscle—that you grow. Over time it becomes more powerful and makes it easier to slip into the present moment.

6. Everyone is human.

"I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough to confess my errors and to retrace my steps."

"It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err."

When you start to make myths out of people—even though they may have produced extraordinary results—you run the risk of becoming disconnected from them. You can start to feel like you could never achieve similar things that they did because they are so very different. So it's important to keep in mind that everyone is just a human being no matter who they are.

And I think it's important to remember that we are all human and prone to make mistakes. Holding people to unreasonable standards will only create more unnecessary conflicts in your world and negativity within you.

It's also important to remember this to avoid falling into the pretty useless habit of beating yourself up over mistakes that you have made. And instead be able to see with clarity where you went wrong and what you can learn from your mistake. And then try again.

7. Persist.

"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you,
then they fight you, then you win."

Be persistent. In time the opposition around you will fade and fall away. And your inner resistance and self-sabotaging tendencies that want to hold you back and keep you like you have always been will grow weaker. Find what you really like to do. Then you'll find the inner motivation to keep going, going and going.

One reason Gandhi was so successful with his method of non-violence was because he and his followers were so persistent. They just didn't give up.

Success or victory will seldom come as quickly as you would have liked it to. I think one of the reasons people don't get what they want is simply because they give up too soon. The time they think an achievement will require isn't the same amount of time it usually takes to achieve that goal. This faulty belief partly comes from the world we live in. A world full of magic pill solutions where advertising continually promises us that we can lose a lot of weight or earn a ton of money in just 30 days.

Finally, one useful tip to keep your persistence going is to listen to Gandhi's third quote in this article and keep a sense of humor. It can lighten things up at the toughest of times.

8. See the good in people and help them.

"I look only to the good qualities of men.
Not being faultless myself, I won't presume
to probe into the faults of others."

"Man becomes great exactly in the degree in which
he works for the welfare of his fellow-men."

"I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles;
but today it means getting along with people."

There is pretty much always something good in people. And things that may not be so good. But you can choose what

things to focus on. And if you want improvement then focusing on the good in people is a useful choice. It also makes life easier for you as your world and relationships become more pleasant and positive.

And when you see the good in people it becomes easier to motivate yourself to be of service to them. By being of service to other people, by giving them value you not only make their lives better. Over time you tend to get what you give. And the people you help may feel more inclined to help other people. And so you, together, create an upward spiral of positive change that grows and becomes stronger.

By strengthening your social skills you can become a more influential person and make this upward spiral even stronger.

9. Be congruent, be authentic, be your true self.

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony."

"Always aim at complete harmony of thought and word and deed. Always aim at purifying your thoughts and everything will be well."

I think that one of the best tips for improving your social skills is to behave in a congruent manner and communicate in an authentic way. People seem to really like authentic communication. And there is much inner enjoyment to be found when your thoughts, words and actions are aligned. You feel powerful and good about yourself.

When words and thoughts are aligned then that shows through in your communication. Because now you have your voice tonality and body language—some say they are over 90 percent of communication—in alignment with your words.

With these channels in alignment people tend to really listen to what you're saying. You are communicating without incongruency, mixed messages or perhaps a sort of phoniness. Also, if your actions aren't in alignment with what you're communicating then you start to hurt your own belief in what you can do. And other people's belief in you too.

10. Continue to grow and evolve.

"*Constant development is the law of life,*
and a man who always tries to maintain
his dogmas in order to appear consistent
drives himself into a false position."

You can pretty much always improve your skills, habits or re-evaluate your evaluations. You can gain deeper understanding of yourself and the world.

Sure, you may look inconsistent or like you don't know what you are doing from time to time. You may have trouble to act congruently or to communicate authentically. But if you don't then you will, as Gandhi says, drive yourself into a false position. A place where you try to uphold or cling to your old views to appear consistent while you realize within that something is wrong. It's not a fun place to be. To choose to grow and evolve is a happier and more useful path to take.

Chapter Two

Leading From Within Reflections on Spirituality and Leadership

from a Talk given in 1990
by Parker J. Palmer

In the last decade or two, we have done a lot of moaning in this country about the lack of moral, humane, and visionary leadership in the public arena. But today, if we have eyes to see, we can took around the world and find those moral, visionary, humane leaders. We can find them in South Africa, we can find them in Latin America, and we can find them in Eastern Europe.

Tonight I want to begin with the words of one of those people, whose credentials for leadership are far more authentic than mine. I want to quote some remarks that Vaclav Havel (playwright, dissident, prisoner, and now

president of Czecho-stovakia) made to the U.S. Congress just a few weeks ago. It was surely one of the most remarkable speeches ever delivered on the floor of our national legislative body:

"As long as people are people, democracy, in the full sense of the word, will always be no more than an ideal. In this sense, you too are merely approaching democracy uninterruptedly for more than 200 years, and your journey toward the horizon has never been disrupted by a totalitarian system.

"The communist type of totalitarian system has left both our nations, Czechs and Slovak, as it has all the nations of the Soviet Union and the other countries the Soviet Union subjugated in its time, a legacy of countless dead, an infinite spectrum of human suffering, profound economic decline and, above all, enormous human humiliation. It has brought us horrors that fortunately you have not known. [I think we Americans should confess that some in our country have known such horrors. -P.J.P.]

"It has also given us something positive, a special capacity to took from time to time somewhat further than someone who has not undergone this bitter experience. A person who cannot move and lead a somewhat normal life because he is pinned under a boulder has more time to think about his hopes than someone who is not trapped that way.

"What I'm trying to say is this: we must all learn many things from you, from how to educate our offspring, how to elect our representatives, all the way to how to organize our economic life so that it will lead to prosperity and not to poverty. But it doesn't have to be merely assistance from the well educated, powerful and wealthy to

someone who has nothing and therefore has nothing to offer in return.

"We too can offer something to you: our experience and the knowledge that has come from it. The specific experience I'm talking about has given me one certainty: consciousness precedes being, and not the other way around, as the Marxists claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility. Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being as humans, and the catastrophe toward which this world is headed—be it ecological, social, demographic or a general breakdown of civilization—will be unavoidable."

Inner Realities

I don't know if there has ever been, from a more remarkable source, a stronger affirmation of the work of religion and higher education than Havel's words, *"Consciousness precedes being,"* and *"The salvation of the world lies in the human heart."* Here is the heart of the matter ——the formation of the human heart, the reformation of the human heart, and the rescuing of the human heart from all its deformations.

Matter, he is trying to tell us, is not the fundamental factor in the movement of history. Spirit is. Consciousness is. Human awareness is. Thought is. Spirituality is. Those are the deep sources of freedom and power with which people have been able to move boulders and create change. Havel's images resonate deeply with all the great religious traditions.

But let me say something that Vaclav Havel was too polite to say: It isn't only the Marxists who have believed that *matter* is more powerful than *consciousness*. It isn't only the Marxists who have believe that economics is more fundamental than spirit. It isn't only the Marxists who have believed that the flow of cash creates more reality than does the flow of ideas. The capitalists have believed these things too, and Havel was simply too nice to say it. But we can say it to ourselves. We can remind ourselves that we have a long and crippling legacy in our own system of thought of believing in the external world much more deeply than we believe in the internal world.

How many times have you heard, "Those are good ideas, inspiring notions, but the reality is….?" How many times have you heard people try to limit our creativity by treating institutional and economic realities as absolute constraints on what we are able to do? How many times have you waited for a foundation grant before taking a step? How many times have you worked in a system based on the belief that the only changes that really matter are are the ones that you can count or measure or tally up externally? This is not just a Marxist problem. This is a human problem, at least in our twentieth century, technological society.

The great insight of our spiritual traditions is that external reality does not impinge upon us as a prison or as an ultimate constraint. The great insight of our spiritual traditions is that we *co-create* the world, that we live in and through a complex interaction of spirit and matter, a complex interaction of what is inside of us and what is "out there." The insight of our spiritual traditions is not to deny the reality of the outer

world, but to help us understand that we create that world, in part, by projecting our spirit on it—for better or worse.

Vaclav Havel has said some hard things to his own people about how they conspired in the domination of a tyrannical communist system through their passivity. We too are responsible for the existence of tyrannical conditions, of external constraints which crush our spirit, because we are responsible for co-creating the world through the projection of our internal limitations. The spiritual traditions tell us that we have complicity in the making of the world as it is. We are not victims of that world, we are its co-creators. The fact that we have complicity in world-making is a source of awesome responsibility (sometimes painful responsibility), and a source of profound hope for change.

Spirituality is not primarily about values and ethics, not about exhortations to do right or live well. The spiritual traditions are primarily about *reality*. The spiritual traditions are an effort to penetrate the illusions of the external world and to name its underlying truth—what it is, how it emerges, and how we relate to it.

The insight that I want to draw from the spiritual traditions, and from Havel, is an insight that may be best expressed in a word from depth psychology. The word is "projection." We share responsibility for creating the external world by projecting either a spirit of light or a spirit of shadow on that which is "other" than us. Either a spirit of hope or a spirit of despair. Either an inner confidence in wholeness and integration, or an inner terror about life being diseased and ultimately terminal. We have a choice about what we are going to project, and in that choice we help create the world that is. *Consciousness precedes being*.

Leaders Have a Shadow Side

What does all of this have to do with leadership, and with the relation of leadership to spirituality? I'll give you a quick definition of a leader: a leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to project on other people his or her shadow, or his or her light. A leader is a person who has an unusual degree of power to create the conditions under which other people must live and move and have their being—conditions that can either be as illuminating as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A leader is a person who must take special responsibility for what's going on inside him or her self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership create more harm than good.

I want to took at the shadow side of leadership. In the literature on leadership there are so many pamphlets and books which seem to be about "the power of positive thinking." I am afraid that they may feed a common delusion among leaders that their efforts are always well-intended, their power always benign. I suggest that the challenge is to examine our consciousness for those ways in which we project more shadow than light.

I'm not talking simply about the heads of nation states. I'm talking, for example, about a classroom teacher who has the power to create conditions under which young people must spend half of their waking hours, day in and day out, five days a week. Have you ever walked into a classroom in which the leader is projecting light? Have you ever walked into a classroom in which the leader is projecting a huge and ominous shadow? That's the question, that's the choice.

I'm thinking about a clergy person who has a choice between creating conditions in a congregation which are of the

light, or conditions which are of the shadow. I'm thinking about the CEO of a corporation, large or small, who faces the same choice day in and day out—but often does not even know that the choice is being made.

The problem is that people rise to leadership in our society by a tendency towards extroversion, which means a tendency to ignore what is going on inside themselves. Leaders rise to power in our society by operating very competently and effectively in the external world, sometimes at the cost of internal awareness. I'm suggesting that leaders, in the very way they become leaders, may tend to be people who screen out the inner consciousness that Vaclav Havel is calling us to attend to. I have met many leaders whose confidence in the external world is so high that they regard the inner life as illusory, as a waste of time, as a magical fantasy trip into a region that doesn't even exist. But the link between leadership and spirituality calls us to re-examine that denial of the inner life.

I think leaders often feed themselves on "the power of positive thinking" because their jobs are hard. They face many external discouragements. They don't get a lot of reward, and so they feel a need to "psych themselves up" even if it means ignoring the inner shadow. Of course leaders are supported in this by an American culture that wants to externalize everything, that wants to see the good life as a matter of external arrangements rather than inner well being.

I've looked at some training program for leaders. I'm discouraged by how often they focus on the development of skills to manipulate the external world rather than *the skills necessary to go inward and make the*

inner journey. I find that discouraging because it feeds a dangerous syndrome in leadership.

Now, let me turn to a comment on the nature of spirituality. Spirituality, like leadership, is a very hard word to pin down. These are probably two of the vaguest words you can find in our language, and when you put them together you get something even vaguer.

Let me share a remarkable quote from Annie Dillard, from a book with the wonderful title, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. This is obviously someone who believes in the inner life—and I have never read a more evocative description of the nature of the inner spiritual journey:

> *"In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters deeper down, if you drop with them farther over the world's rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here. This is given. It is not learned."*

Going In and Down

Annie Dillard is saying several things that are very important for a spirituality of leadership. She is saying, first of all, that the spiritual journey moves downward and inward, not upward toward abstraction. It moves downward toward the hardest concrete realities of of our lives. Part of the gift of feminist spirituality is a reversal of what we traditionally

understood spirituality to be, which was up and out——up, up, and away!

Annie Dillard is saying that we must go in and down. And she's saying that on the way down and in, we will meet the violence and terror we have within ourselves that we project outward onto our institutions, onto our society. She's talking, for example, about our tendency to make enemies by projecting what we hate within ourselves on somebody else because we don't want to go down and in and meet the enemy in our own souls. So we imagine that someone out there is the enemy—people of another race, people of another economic system—and we deal with the "enemy" by killing them, when what we are really reacting to is the shadow in ourselves.

Annie Dillard is saying we have to go down and in, and on the way we meet monsters. But if we ride those monsters all the way down, we find the most precious thing of all: the unified field, our complex and inexplicable caring for one another, the community we have underneath our brokenness, our life together which, she says, is given, not learned. Great leadership comes from people who have made that downward journey through violence and terror, who have touched the deep place where we are in community with each other, and who can help take other people to that place. *That is what great leadership is all about.*

That's what Vaclav Havel is talking about, because the downward journey is what you take when you are "under a stone" for 40 years. That's what you do when you are a victim of oppression. Isn't it remarkable how Nelson Mandela took 30 years in prison to prepare himself for leadership rather than for despair? He went down, and he went in, and he dealt with the violence and terror, and he emerged a leader of amazing

strength able to lead people toward "our complex and inexplicable caring for each other." It seems to me that this is a splendid image for the spiritual journey, the journey that leaders must take if Havel and Dillard are right.

Now the question is, why would anybody want to take such a difficult and dangerous journey? Everything in us cries out against it. That's why we externalize everything—it's easier to deal with the external world. It's easier to spend your life manipulating an institution than it is dealing with your own soul. It truly is. We make institutions sound complicated and hard and rigorous, but they are a piece of cake compared with our inner workings!

Get Into It

Let me tell you a little parable about why one might want to take the inner journey, a little parable from my own life. It was about ten years ago. I was in my early forties. I decided to go on that amazing program called Outward Bound. I was in the midst of a mid-life crisis at the lime—one of those times when the violence and terror within us start to come up.

I thought Outward Bound might be a useful challenge at that time in my life, and I elected to spend ten days at a place called Hurricane Island. I should have known from the name what was in store for me. The next time I will choose the program at Pleasant Valley, or at Happy Gardens! It was a week of sheer terror. It was also a week of amazing growth and great teaching and a deep sense of community, the likes of which I've seldom experienced.

In the middle of that Outward Bound course I faced the challenge that I had most feared. They backed me up to the edge of a cliff that was 110 feel off the ground. They tied a very thin rope to my waist, a frayed and stretchy rope, and then they told me to back down that cliff.

So I said, “Well, what do I do?”

The instructor, in typical Outward Bound fashion, said, “GO!”

So I went, and I went BOOM!, down to that first ledge. I just slammed into that ledge with considerable force.

The instructor looked down at me and said, “l don't think you quite have it yet.”

I said, “Right. Now what do I do?”

He said, “The only way to do this is to lean back as far as you can, because you have to get your feet at right angles to the rock face so you'll have pressure on them.”

Of course I *knew* that he was wrong. I knew that the trick was to hug the mountain, to stay as close to the rock face as you can. So I tried it again, and ... BOOM!, I hit the ledge. Not quite as hard, but I slipped and hit it again.

He said, “You still don't have it.” And I said, “Well, what do I do?”

And he said, “Lean way back and take the next step.”

The next step was a very big one, but I took it. Wonder of wonders, I began to get it. I leaned back, and sure enough, I was moving down that rock face, eyes on the heavens, making tiny, tiny, tiny movements with my feet, but gaining confidence with every step.

When I got about half way down, a second instructor called up from below. She said, “Parker, I think you better stop and took at what’s happening beneath your feet.”

So I lowered my eyes (very slowly, so that I wouldn’t change my center of gravity), and there beneath my feet a large hole was opening up in the rock, which meant that I was going to have to change directions.

I froze. I have never been so paralyzed in my life, so full of physical fear. I knew I could do it if I could just keep going straight, but I could *not* change directions. I just froze in sheer terror.

The teacher let me hang there for what seemed like a very tong time, and finally she shouted up, “Parker, is anything wrong?”

To this day, I do not know where these words came from (though I have twelve witnesses that I spoke them). But in a high, squeaky voice I said, “I don’t want to talk about it.”

The teacher said, “Then I think it’s time you learned the motto of the Outward Bound School.”

I thought, “Oh, keen! I”m about to die, and she's giving me a motto!”

But then she yelled up to me words that I will never forget, words that have been genuinely empowering for me ever since. She said, “The motto of the Outward Bound Hurricane Island School is, ‘IF YOU CAN’T GET OUT OF IT, GET INTO IT’”

I have believed in the idea of “the word became flesh” for a long time, but I had never had a real experience of it. But those words seemed so profoundly true to me at that existential moment that they entered my body, bypassed my

mind, and moved my legs and feet. It was just so clear that there was no way out of that situation except to get into it. No helicopter was going to come; they weren't going to haul me up on the rope; I wasn't going to float down. I had to get into it, and my feet started to move.

That image is very powerful to me. It is an image of the movement of the spiritual life and why it is that anyone would ever want to take the inner journey that Annie Dillard writes about. The answer is: There is no way out of our inner lives, so we'd better get into them. In the downward, inward journey, the only way out is in and through.

Out of the Shadow, Into the Light

I want to talk specifically about the shadow life of leaders. I'd like to talk about the way those shadows get projected on institutions and on our society. I'd like to talk about some monsters that leaders need to ride all the way down if we are to create less shadow and more light. I have five of them as a sampler, and a few thoughts on how the inner journey might transform our leadership at these five points.

One of the biggest shadows inside a lot of leaders is deep insecurity about their own identity, their own worth. That insecurity is hard to see in extroverted people. But the extroversion is often there precisely because we are insecure about who we are and are trying to prove ourselves in the external world rather than wrestling with our inner identity.

This insecurity takes a specific form that I have seen many times, (especially in men), and I see in myself: we have an identity that is so hooked up with external, institutional

functions that we may literally die when those functions are taken away from us. We live in terror at the thought of what will happen to us if our institutional identity were ever to disappear.

Do you know the tragedy I see in our institutions when leaders operate with a deep, unexamined insecurity about their own identity? These leaders create institutional settings which deprive other people of their identity as a way of dealing with the unexamined fears in the leaders themselves.

Can I give a simple little example, which may even be painful? I am astonished at the number of times I call an office and the person who answers the phone says, "Dr. Jones' office; this is Nancy," because the boss has said to do it that way. The leader has a title and no first name; the person who answers the phone doesn't even have a last name. This is a powerful example of depriving someone else of an identity in order to enhance your own.

Everywhere I took I see institutions that are depriving large numbers of people of their identity so that a few people can enhance theirs. I look at schools and I see hundreds of thousands of students who have been deprived of an identity by the educational system so that teachers and administrators can have more identity for themselves, as if this were a zero-sum game, a win-lose situation.

I go around the country talking to people in higher education, and wherever I go I ask students, "When was the last time that you were asked to relate your life story to the things you are studying?" They say, "What? Our life story doesn't count here." The whole deal in higher education is to replace your "little" life story with the "big" story. The whole deal in an expert-dominated, technocratic form of

education is to devalue those little parochial stories on behalf of the "true" one. Reflected in that strategy I see a kind of leadership which is so insecure about its own identity that it has to deprive other people of theirs.

I've talked with some nurses and doctors who say, "Think of what we do to patients in a hospital. Talk about depriving people of identity so that leaders can have more for themselves,!" This kind of organizational culture comes out of a profound insecurity on the part of people in power.

But if you're ever with people (or in an organization led by a person) who know "all the way down" who they are, whose identity doesn't depend on a role which might be taken, away at any moment, you are with people and in settings which *give* you identity, which *empower* you to be someone. I think that's a core issue in the spirituality of leadership, because the great spiritual gift that comes as one takes the inward journey is to know for certain that "who I am" does not depend on "what I do." Identity doesn't depend on titles. It doesn't depend on degrees. It doesn't depend on functioning. It depends only on the simple fact that I am a child of God, valued and treasured for what I am. When a leader knows that, the classroom is different, the hospital is different, and the office is different.

Is the Universe Safe?

That's the first shadow of leadership I want to name. The second shadow that is inside a lot of us (and please understand that I am talking about myself and my struggles here as much as anybody else's), is the perception that the

universe is essentially hostile to human interests and that life is fundamentally a battleground.

As I listen to everyday discourse, it is amazing to me how many battle images I hear as people go about the work of leadership. We talk about tactics and strategy, about using our "big guns," about "do or die," about wins and losses. The imagery here suggests that if we fail to be fiercely competitive, we're going to lose, because the basic structure of the universe is a vast combat. The tragedy of that inner shadow, that unexamined inner fear, is that it helps create situations where people actually have to live that way. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is a central concept in the problem that I'm talking about. A quick example: a bank in this town may be a perfectly sound bank. But if enough people start a false rumor that it's an insolvent bank, everybody will line up to withdraw their money and the bank *will* be insolvent because the prophecy has fulfilled itself.

Our commitment to competition is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yes, the world is competitive, but only because we make it that way. Some of the best places in our world, some of the best corporations, some of the best schools, are learning that there is *another* way of going about things, a way that's consensual, that's cooperative, that's communal. They are fulfilling a different prophecy and creating a different reality.

The spiritual gift we receive as we take the inward journey is the knowledge that the universe is working together for good. The universe really isn't out to get anybody; the structure of reality is not the structure of a battle or a combat. Yes, there's death, but it's part of the cycle of life, and when people learn to move with that cycle, there is a coherence and

great harmony in our lives. That's the spiritual insight that can transform this particular dimension of leadership—and transform our institutions.

The third shadow in leaders I call "functional atheism." This is the belief that ultimate responsibility for everything rests with *me.* It is a belief held even among people whose theology affirms a higher power than the human self, people who do not understand themselves as atheists but whose behavior belies their belief!

Functional atheism is an unconscious belief that leads to workaholic behavior, to burn-out, to stressed and strained and broken relationships, to unhealthy priorities. Functional atheism is the unexamined conviction within us that if anything decent is going to happen here, *I* am the one who needs to make it happen. Functional atheism is the reason why the average group (according to studies) can tolerate only 15 seconds of silence; people believe that if they are not making noise, nothing is happening! Functional atheism is an inner shadow of leaders that leads to dysfunctional behavior on every level of our lives.

The great gift we receive on the inner journey is the certain knowledge that ours is not the only act in town. Not only are there other acts in town, but some of them, from time to time, are even better than ours! On this inner journey we learn that we do not have to carry the whole load, that we can be empowered by sharing the load with others, and that sometimes we are even free to lay our part of the load down. On the inner journey we learn that co-creation leaves us free to do only what we are called and able to do, and to trust the rest to other hands.; With that learning, we become leaders who cast less shadow and more light.

The Shadow of Fear

The fourth shadow among leaders is fear. There are many kinds of fear, but I am thinking especially of our fear of the natural chaos of life. I think a lot of leaders become leaders because they have a life-long devotion to eliminating all remnants of chaos from the world. They're trying to order and organize things so thoroughly that the nasty stuff will never bubble up around us—such nasty stuff as dissent, innovation, challenge, and change.

In an organization, this particular shadow gets projected outward as rigidity of rules, procedures, and personnel manuals. It creates corporate cultures that are imprisoning rather than empowering. What we forget from our spiritual tradition is that God *created* out of chaos. Chaos is the pre-condition to creativity, and any organization (or any individual) that doesn't have an arena of creative chaos is already half dead. When a leader is so fearful of chaos as not to be able to protect and nurture that arena for other people, there is deep trouble.

The spiritual gift on the inner journey is to know that creation comes out of chaos, and that even what has been created needs to be returned to chaos every now and then to get recreated in a more vital form. The spiritual gift on this inner journey is the knowledge that in chaos I can not only survive, but I can thrive, that there is vitality in that chaotic field of energy.

Denial of Death

My final example of the shadows that leaders can project on others involves the denial of death. We live in a

culture that just does not want to talk about things dying. You see this all the time in our institutional life. You see leaders all over the place demanding that they themselves, and the people who work for them, artificially maintain things that aren't alive any longer and maybe never have been. Projects and programs that should have been laid down ten years ago are still on the life-support system even though they've been in a coma for decades.

There's fear in this denial of death, the fear of negative evaluation, the fear of public failure. Surprisingly, the people in our culture who are least afraid of death, in this sense, are the scientists. The scientific community really honors the failure of a hypothesis because they *learn* something from the death of an idea. But in a lot of organizations, if you fail at what you are doing, you'll find a pink slip in your box. Again, the best organizations and leaders, I think, are asking people to take action that may sometimes lead to failure, to understand that from failure we learn.

The spiritual gift on the inner journey is the knowledge that death is natural and that death is not the final word. The spiritual gift is to know that allowing something to die is also allowing new life to emerge. That's the core spiritual insight that can move us beyond our denial of death.

My final words have to do with how we can help each other deal with the spiritual issues inherent in leadership. We *must* help each other because these are critical issues. The failure of leaders to deal with their own inner life is creating conditions of real misery for lots and lots of folks. Too many organizations in our

society are in deep trouble around the leadership shadows I have tried to name. One way out of trouble is for leaders to start recovering the power of the inner journey. How might that happen? A few quick comments.

It would be wonderful if the phrase "inner work" could become a central term in our schools and in our churches, if we could help people understand that the phrase really means something. There are things that you can do that constitute "inner work" that are as real and as important as any outer project or task. It would be grand if you had a committee of people in the church who are doing "inner work" as well as the outer work of the congregation. Some churches do: they have people who engage in intercessory prayer. And there: are many other forms of "inner work" as well.

A second thing we can do is to remind each other that while inner work is a deeply *personal* matter, it's not necessarily a *private* matter. There are ways to be together in community to help each other with that "inner work." I have been very touched in my own experience by the Quaker tradition where they know how to come together around people who have deep "inner work" to do. They come together with them in a way that is supportive but not invasive, that asks a lot of questions but never renders judgment or gives advice. They come together with ·them in a way that respects the mystery of the human heart, but that still allows people to challenge and stretch one another in that work.

The German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, has a little book called *Letters to a Young Poet*, one of the most

beautiful books I have ever read. In that book he has a definition of love which astounds me. I want to quote it because it's the kind of thing I'm trying to communicate about being together in our "inner work." Rilke says, "Love is this—that two solitudes border, protect, and salute one another." He avoids the invasive and violent notion of "getting in there and fixing each other up" that we have in our culture. But he affirms the possibility of being present to a person's solitude, a person's mystery, while that deep "inner work" goes on.

I wish I had time to tell you, as a person who's struggled through two bouts of that deep inner work called "depression," about the healing that came as a few people found ways to stand at the border of my solitude in that experience. They provided life-lines to the human community for me, without being driven by their own fears to either "fix" or abandon me. It *is* possible for people to be together that way if we have education for leadership that is not simply about the skills to manipulate the external world, but is also about the personal and corporate disciplines of the inner world.

Finally, we need to remember that all the great spiritual traditions, when you boil them down, are saying one simple thing: ***Be Not Afraid!*** They don't say you can't have fear, because we all have fears, and leaders have fears aplenty. But they say you don't have to *be* your fears, and you don't have to create a world in which those fears dominate the conditions of many, many people.

I know that many of you are on this journey toward leading from within. I'm grateful for your companionship, and I wish you blessings and power as

you continue this work of inner discovery and leadership in your own lives.

For more information on Parker J. Palmer:

On Substack, **parkerjpalmer.substack.com**

The Center for Courage & Renewal website: couragerenewal.org/parker-j-palmer/ or chick **here**

Chapter Three

Chris Anderson Is the Curator of TED

Interview by Patrick Pittman

I work in a building full of extraordinary people. These people are never so excited as when they are sharing their latest discovery from the thousand or so presentations on TED Talks.

Whether it's a scientist prodding a brain, Bill Gates releasing mosquitoes into a crowd, a demonstration of a new prosthetic arm, a printable kidney, a mapping of the multiverse, or just a magic show, we gather around laptops enthusiastically carried between offices, gasping at the possibility of ideas. We're nerds that way.

Chris Anderson made his fortune in publishing, back when people could make their fortune in publishing (we have not, as yet, made our fortune in publishing). He grew up in Pakistan, the child of medical missionaries.

After a childhood that took him through the Himalayas, Afghanistan and India, he pioneered the British computer magazine industry. In the 1980s and early 1990s his company Future Publishing was responsible for some of the biggest-

selling magazines around. These were the magazines that made my unashamedly geeky childhood bookshelves sag. Around the turn of the century, after moving across the pond and cracking the American market, Chris turned his attention to a much more ambitious project: changing the world.

The TED conference had been taking place in California since the early 1980s. TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) was, historically, a place where well-to-do entrepreneurs could gather and be inspired by revolutionary thinkers, and by each other. After Chris and his not-for-profit foundation took the reins in 2001, TED went through some remarkable changes. Over the course of a decade, it has become a stage upon which some of the world's greatest and most innovative thinkers share their ideas and, in eighteen minutes, give the talk of their lives, to an audience of hundreds of millions.

The real revolution happened in 2006, when Chris and his team made the decision to give all of their content away, on the internet, for free. A conference which had often been described as a fascinating, elitist playground of ideas for the privileged (who could afford the several-thousand-dollar seats) became a radical force for the spread of innovation. Its audience spiralled into the hundreds of millions.

In 2008, the conference spread its tentacles further into the grassroots with the launch of TEDx, a brand and toolkit for community-organised conferences staged around the world with the endorsement of central command. There are now several hundred TEDx conferences taking place every year, run by volunteers and attended by thousands.

TED has grown from a conference into a movement of ideas. Chris has come to believe that the power to share video

online may well become one of the most important innovations in human history, up there with Gutenberg. As we attempted to speak on Skype, and I took in the pixelated bookshelves of TED's New York offices, we grappled with disappearing sound and stuttering video, leading me to believe we may be a way off of that ideal. But Chris's enthusiasm and world-changing fervour can't be quelled by the simple limitations of the technology we have—the future is just around the corner.

Patrick Pittman: As somebody who remembers looking in awe at the first issue of Zzap!64 in my cousin's bedroom back in the mid 1980s, it's quite a privilege to be speaking to the man who founded it.

Chris Anderson: Oh my goodness! Wow. That is a long time ago. I think the art of the magazine has moved on a little since then, but that was a hilarious time. It was one of the first magazines that was put together with computerised typesetting.

It's a very different game than the current one. It's funny though, I think there was something different going on then, even in those magazines, that was inspiring me. It was a different game you were playing to the publishing industry at the time.

We weren't fully sure of the language to talk about it then, but I guess the narrative was passion and authenticity, and trying to tap into real voices.

There was nothing more exciting at the time than computers, and they were being written about by slightly cynical jaded professionals. The insight with that magazine was to find the kids who were really passionate about it and teach them to write, rather than try to inject passion into jaded

hacks who were never going to get the excitement of that new world.

Passion was the clue, when I first went to TED, that there was something really special there. That's part of why I fell in love with it and decided it was the kind of thing you could devote a life to. So there's a tenuous connection, at least.

That moment, when you first went to TED, and decided that you were going to buy this conference—was that a lightning bolt moment, an "I have to do this"?

I'd made some money from the magazine world. I knew that at some point I wanted to figure out some way of using some of that money to make a difference, but it wasn't clear how.

I was interested in all the upsides of human intention: technology, mass media, education, entrepreneurship. All of those things were of interest, but the single biggest amplifier has always been the great idea, the idea whose time has come, because it spreads of its own accord, sweeping all before it, rewiring brains as it goes, persuading people to do its bidding [laughs].

There was certainly a lot of excitement that there was something very special happening here, but it took several years to actually acquire TED and put it into the foundation, and then to realise that this was something that I could spend all of my time on. That was a process, but the falling in love was a lightning bolt.

It was a very powerful first year experience. It wasn't on the first day, there was bafflement mainly then—why on earth was I listening to people from all these different disciplines? Did I really need to listen to architects, primatologists and so on? It didn't make sense, because we don't normally do that. We're interested in the thing that we're

working on. Most of us have tunnel vision and we're focused on that. We're told that that's what you have to do to be successful—focus, dig deep, all that sort of stuff, to the extent that many people have lost the context of their work, and the fact that knowledge is connected.

You actually don't really truly understand anything unless you understand the context in which it happens.

There is unbelievable inspiration and wisdom to be gained from listening to people well outside your field. The breakthrough spark often comes from outside the little box in which you're focussed. All those things in their different moments were clear in a way at that very first TED.

But it was a very personal story of Aimee Mullins, the athlete who unscrewed her artificial leg on stage and changed it for a different one, and talked about possibility in a very personal way. I was sitting there with tears streaming down my face, thinking, "Okay, I get it, I get what people love about this thing." The journey since then has been one of trying to let what was special there out into the world.

The revelation a few years back of the power of the creative commons, and that these talks could be given away for free, that changed things again. It brought these ideas out into the world, well beyond that stage in California. Were you prepared for what happened there?

Back in 2002 when I first took over, YouTube was in no-one's mind, and the power of online video and what that would mean, that just didn't exist.

The early thoughts about what it meant to let TED out into the world were around the TED Prize—let's get behind one of these ideas as a whole community and try to make it real—and things like early versions of our Fellows program—

not everybody can afford to come to this thing, so let's pick people who really should be here and pay for them to come.

We had a hopeful notion of a bigger audience, but we didn't know how to do it. We'd talked with some TV companies about putting TED on TV, and really nobody was interested—"Talking heads are terrible television, you can't possibly do that!" We thought they were wrong, but no-one was interested.

The economics eventually allowed online video to work. When you think about it, in pretty much two years, the de facto cost of sending one person's heartfelt message from point A in the world to point B fell from about two dollars, when you'd have had to duplicated it onto a DVD and mail it in 2003, to a penny in 2006. There's a spectacular cost reduction, and it really did change what was possible. Suddenly a whole bunch of things could be shared online that could never be shared before.

We decided to take a risk with some of the talks, a little bit fearful that we were giving away the crown jewels, but it felt like the right thing to do. The astonishing thing for us was not so much that it was hard to interpret the numbers—a few thousand people watched, it was neither small nor big—but what was special was the tone of the reactions to that experiment.

The people who were seeing them were reacting in ways that you could tell that the talks had just got inside their heads.

They made them laugh, they made them excited, they made them want to email all their friends, they made them weep. They sparked passion, and that was thrilling. That, to me, has always been the clue that you are onto something. It

persuaded us to reengineer TED—instead of being a conference, it became a website. The conference generated the content, but the real audience was online, and it became "ideas worth spreading".

A few months after that, in early 2007, we launched the new TED.com, and ever since, we've seen this constant upward march of viewership, which has been pretty exciting to see.

You draw a possibly outlandish comparison between the online video revolution and Gutenberg's invention of the moveable type printing press. Will it really be that significant in our history?

It sounds preposterous at first, it sounds like a cheap throw-away statement, but I actually think it is true. The reason it's true is that human-to-human communication is powerful at a whole new level, more so than written communication can ever be.

It's a cliché to say that ninety per cent, or pick a number, of communication is non-verbal, I don't know if that is dependable, but certainly a lot of communication is non-verbal. When a speaker in a theatrical situation is surrounded by a watching audience, they are tracking every movement of their eyes, every emotional twitch on their face, every sound of vulnerability or confidence in their voice. They're looking at their gestures, at their body language, but there's an explosion of activity going on in the audience that you don't get by reading print.

Some of it is actually quite mysterious, but at its best it is unbelievably powerful. My view is that online video has allowed that process, that experience, to go global, and that is

a very big deal. It's meant that, for the first time ever, the world's most ambitious communicators, instead
of spending all their time writing—which has been the right strategy for the last 500 years—can actually consider communicating directly, and for some of them, for people with the right talent who can figure it out, that becomes an extraordinary platform.

Suddenly there are these invisible people, who had brilliant ideas but no real way of getting them out there, with global audiences in the millions. It has transformed them, and is in danger of sending ripples right across the world.

It's a very thrilling thing.

Viewed from the student end of it, this is an amazing time. For the first time in history, any ambitious student gets to sit and meet, a foot away on their screen, the world's most gifted teacher in their subject, and learn directly from them. That's an incredible thing. So it's exactly that: it's a giant leap in the very process of spreading ideas, and there will be huge knock-on effects.

It interests me how this changes our ideas of the ways in which innovation and learning come about. Traditionally we have a very linear view of pedagogy—you learn one thing, you learn on top of that, you learn on top of that, you gain skills, and you create. Something that happens in the online video world, and particularly with TED, is that beautiful thing that comes about in the pool of ideas, of the pool of brilliance, of people who challenge, who open up spaces. Learning isn't linear in there—there's innovation in the chaos. It's a pretty fertile ground, isn't it?

It is fertile, and I don't think it's fully understood. It's clear that a lot of learning is best thought of as linear. For

example, to learn mathematics, there are certain skills you need to learn before you can learn other skills. However there are also many, many areas where the right way to think of ideas, or of innovation, is that those things happen as a result of the collision of different ideas in unexpected ways.

Matt Ridley's phrase is that ideas spread by having sex, and I think that's a perfectly good way to think of it. Every receiving brain out there is different, everyone is prepped a little differently, and when you combine a set of ideas from here, and a set of ideas from there, and mix them up, it's in the mixing and in the provocation and in the catalytic work that occasionally something truly spectacular and new pops out.

Steven Johnson talks about ideas being liquid networks. This is why multidisciplinary thinking and provocation is so powerful, you can have these giant *ah-ha!* moments. Personally, for me about fourteen months ago, I had one of those moments watching a dance troupe. I realised that the process that had pulled them together—recruitment over the internet—and had driven their skills— seeing —was the exact same process that I'd seen happening in TED speakers: improvement through being shown stuff.

It got me very excited about the role that online video plays in innovation. By opening yourself up to stimulation from these different ideas, you can get a moment of blinding excitement from seeing the pieces together.

In your role as a curator, whether you're presenting a scientist talking about emergent intelligence, or somebody designing a building in a desert, or a performance artist, or a robotics pioneer, or whatever, how do those go towards telling a story? Do you guide that by your own intellectual curiosities?

It's a mixture of art and science, there's no cast iron formula. In terms of putting a program together, it does seem to work to give exposure to lots of different parts of the brain. The reason that people get exhausted and bored at conferences is that they're being hit again and again with one particular type of thinking. It's your left-brain, analytical thinking, analytical thinking, analytical thinking, all in the same subject area. After not too long, it's "take me out of here, I need coffee and I need it now."

If you mix it up a bit, not just in subject matter terms but in way of thinking, so you include the aesthetic, you include comedy, it just works, our brains say "thank you very much", and they find extra inspiration from that. The hard stuff, you are somehow more motivated to understand it, and when you do understand it, you feel it with greater excitement than if you were just being endlessly exposed to one serious topic after another.

So that's part of it, trying to explain the artful ways of mixing it up. Beyond that, we try each year to come up with a theme that's narrow enough to be interesting but broad enough to allow a really large array of content, and then you try and take people on a journey. It often starts off with some big ideas, big new discoveries and so forth, and you weave in some storytelling and remarkable artistic endeavour. As time goes on, there's music in there, there's comedy. Towards the end you may have some very personal storytelling, from people who are willing to be vulnerable. By that point, people have come away from a very closed and defensive attitude, and are willing to embrace that. If all goes well, by the end of the four days, people have a very strong sense of possibility.

How have the TEDx conferences changed your idea of what TED is?

In lots of ways. It was a big surprise, the extent to which it has taken off. We're getting about ten to twenty license applications per day at this point. We're not accepting all of them, but there are three or four TEDx events every day in the world, and it has been absolutely incredible to see how much time and effort and brilliance these organisers are putting into these events.

They're mostly selling out. It's become a number of things. One of the most exciting things it has become is a global laboratory of reinvention in the art of human-to-human communication. People are learning from each other, and we are learning from them. My view is that it still early days in this reinvention process, the way in which rediscovering what a modern campfire really looks like, we're all in the process of doing that.

These organisers are playing a fantastic role in that—apart from anything else, they are recruiting this massive army of speakers from every city on the planet that people have heard of, and giving them a chance to shine. Thousands of TEDx talks are posted on YouTube, so it's this huge content aggregator, and we get to cherry pick the best of those for our site. Right there, being a funnel of great ideas from all over the world is a very powerful thought, and it's turned TED from being an organisation of 50 people in New York, to a global force of thousands of volunteers, who are all as passionate about TED as we are. It's been amazing to see.

You're a long way from growing up in Pakistan, learning in the Himalayas, through life as a magazine entrepreneur to a life now as a curator and steward of ideas

for an impossibly large global audience. When you look at that now, do you trace a journey for yourself? Do you see a consistent drive that you've had?

You know, I'm not sure that the narrative is about this vision of one person. My internal narrative on this is that TED has a life of its own. A number of things happened, I hired an amazing team, there's a lot of talent and commitment here, people love TED's mission and work their hearts out for it. It is spectacular seeing that team fly, but beyond that, seeing this global army of volunteers, as translators and TEDx organisers, doing their thing, and realising that we've tapped into an idea whose time has come.

The world is at a point where mass media has let us down in certain ways, the conversation there has gotten hijacked, to the dramatic or the confrontational or celebrity gossip, and there are actually millions of people out there hungry to learn, who believe in the possibility of a better future, and believe that they might even play a role in shaping it. They get really, really turned on by people willing to share that vision.

TED is best thought of as a way of sharing ideas that just happens to be a great fit for the world that we're in right now. It really, really works well live and really works well online. It really works live because it is profoundly respectful of the audience's time. Speakers are expected to make a massive effort to make sure that their eighteen minutes are really valuable, and useful to other people. And that turns out to be a lot more interesting than listening to another "blah, blah, blah" panel. It works well online because it's long enough to say something really serious and be a counterpoint to all the trivial buzz that's out there, but it's still short enough

to go viral, to be listened to on a coffee break and forwarded to your friends.

For better or worse, you can't grow up in an international school and spend time in lots of different countries and not end up as some kind of global soul, so my lens has always been that there's a big world out there, with lots of issues, lots of problems, it would be nice at some point to figure out some way of contributing. So that's been there and I've been looking for it, and there's huge, huge serendipity in ending up at TED at the right moment in my life. I play a role, but this thing, if we hadn't done it, somebody else would have. And TED of course is only a small part of it; there are lots of other people doing amazing things and sharing video online, this world in which you can tap into crowd wisdom, and we can connect with each other in a whole different way. It's a very exciting time to live and to work in media.

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Chapter Four

Jan Owen Mentors Future Chasers

Interview by Nathan Scolaro

Nathan Scolaro on Jan Owen: No one waves the flag for today's generation of young people like Jan Owen. As far as she's concerned, Australia's future is bright—indeed, the world's future is bright.

We just need to invest the energy into empowering the next crop of leaders and give them the tools to act while their visions are big. Jan's the kind of antidote to cynicism that every teenager and 20-something needs—especially in these times when just about everyone else is accusing them of being lazy, narcissistic and disengaged. She's the one who believes in you, who knows you can do it.

Mentorship has been a big part of Jan's experience. She's both been a mentor and had mentors—of all ages, from all walks of life. And she's observed that for more and more young people today, valuable mentors are found close to home —they're parents and friends as opposed to celebrities on Instagram. After all, if young people are to succeed, they need

someone real in their corner. Jan has been that person to thousands of Australians for more than 30 years.

As a child in Brisbane, Jan grew up watching her parents perform incredible acts of social justice, like rescuing mothers and children from domestic violence incidents and giving them a couch to sleep on. They were the kind of people who acted when something needed to be done, and that's exactly how Jan has approached her work in youth advocacy —ever since she started out as a drug and alcohol educator in her early 20s. After various roles in child and family welfare, and having three children of her own, Jan applied that grit, determination and massive heart for social justice to establish CREATE, a foundation dedicated to supporting and connecting young people in foster care. It was during this time that she took in a homeless 15-year-old named Liz who has since become a much-loved member of the Owen family.

In 2010 Jan was made CEO of the Foundation for Young Australians, an independent not-for-profit that runs a range of initiatives designed with and for young people to achieve their full potential and deliver change across the world. When we talk, I'm moved by her fresh perspective, how she sees teenagers and 20-somethings as this incredibly savvy, compassionate and socially aware force. It's particularly stimulating as someone on the cusp of that cohort, who for too many years now has been fed only demoralising rhetoric about his generation.

Through the Skype cam I watch Jan pace from the couch to the kitchen table to the bottom of the staircase, drawing the laptop in when she gets passionate, pulling it away when she reflects on something. I can feel her great

sense of urgency about what needs to change in Australia, and she knows exactly who can deliver it. We just need to listen.

Nathan Scolaro: You're a young people's champion. An incredible doer too. What gets you out of bed every morning?

Jan Owen: I feel ridiculously privileged to do the work I do—in this country, with our young people. There has never been a generation like it. They are absolutely on fire. They are disruptive, they are innovative. They have the tools for innovation. I just get to help bring it on. Through FYA I get to provide platforms and resources and support that will help unleash this generation of young Australians on the world. Doing that everyday is a gift. I literally have the best job in Australia.

And you've been working with young people for nearly 30 years. That's a phenomenal commitment to the cause.

I was a fledging maverick from Brisbane who took on leadership roles at an early age. I was just fortunate to be a young person who was passionate about social justice and had a strong entrepreneurial bent.

Where did that come from?

I'm actually unsure. I was adopted as a child so I guess I have both nature and nurture influences. My father was in chemistry and mathematics and he helped Hewlett Packard put some of their first computers together. That was pretty entrepreneurial now I think of it. I just had that drive. As a kid I had the obligatory entrepreneur's lemonade stand and then moved on to selling large polished rocks, which I tried to flog off as dinosaur or emu eggs! Neither of those could be described as hugely successful. Then I had a venture called Toads Inc. with my three younger brothers where we would

catch toads and deliver them live to the vet science department at the university for a fee. Things changed at 14 when I started leading church youth groups. At 19 I became a youth worker. If you get picked as a leader in those situations you get an enormous amount of responsibility and opportunity, and I quickly ended up on a national platform with the first youth council of Australia.

Amazing that you had this strong sense of social justice at such a young age.

Well, my parents helped establish Lifeline, and in those early days as a counsellor you took the crisis call, put the phone down, got in your car and drove to the person in trouble. I spent many a night as a six, seven year old in the back of my parent's car watching them go into houses where there were serious domestic violence incidents going on, and then coming out with the mother and children and bringing them back to our house. I would wake up on any given morning and there would be a family on our lounge-room floor. This was social justice live.

Wow.

But for my parents it was just what you did. In no sense would they have called themselves social justice leaders or advocates. They were relatively quiet people. They genuinely thought that the way communities work was that you help people who were in trouble—and that that trouble doesn't last forever. We all, at different times, need support. So I think it clicked for me really early as a child that these were episodes in people's lives over which they had little control, but with some support they could get back on their feet. And I've always had that view. I've never held a welfare view. I've always believed that community and civil society work really

well when people are there for each other, and that every one of us needs support at different stages in our lives.

What were your experiences as a teenager like?

I had wanderlust from a very young age. I first tried to leave home when I was about five. I was born in Melbourne and my family found me up the Nepean Highway. School was an absolute barrier to the real world for me. I went to three different high schools.I was either asked to leave or expelled from each of them. When I was 13, one of the deputies at my school took my parents aside and said, "One of the best options for Jan is that she goes to Coles now and gets a job as a check-out chick. In fact, her maths isn't that great so that might even be difficult."

It's a common story for entrepreneurs. It is. And of course my parents were incredibly angry, but I always believed that school failed me, I didn't fail school. I was so sure of that. By the time I was in years 11 and 12 I was absent from most classes, but then I was also doing things like setting up social justice groups that reached out to the community. I established the first motor mechanics course at a girls' school in Australia. And for a year I wrote a 100-page magazine each week canvassing everything going on at school. I think my last school thought, *We can't really expel her—she's a sports captain, she's in the debating team, she got us on the front page of the newspaper, it's just that she won't come to school. [Laughs].*

Why do you think you struggled with the education system?

Unfortunately the education system then and now, which is something I find really distressing, is not designed for a range of learning styles, or around people exploring their

passions and interests. It's becoming more and more narrow. The fact that you make your subject choices for the rest of your life at year nine and 10 just seems bizarre to me when you're in this period of intense development.

The best we can possibly do is give young people a set of transferrable skills, and let them explore those and test them.

Entrepreneurship in my view is one of those core skills. How to be enterprising, innovative and solution-focused should be core curriculum today. In this country, on any one day, there are a quarter of a million young people who just aren't at school. Today. And part of that is because of an outdated education system that doesn't connect to students. What needs to change?

I think education and learning has to radically change. I don't think it's a couple of incremental steps. There are some monumental leaps we need to take. Globally, we're in a two-speed system, which makes this difficult. There are children in the world who don't have access to basic education. For them, turning up to school is still an absolute privilege. But in Australia, we've had hundreds of years of compulsory, formal education, and we're now at a place where we need to rethink what education is for, what the experience is about. We need to talk about lifelong learning—the fact that our children are going to have 13 or 14 different jobs in their lifetime, many of which don't exist yet. This means we're going to need a learning environment that's a constant throughout life. I created that for myself through experiential learning, a vivid imagination and a thirst for ideas and pure determination. I did that despite having a poor formal education. But that's not the

way everyone works. So we need to build a system that's enabling of that.

What would that system look like?

It's something that happens early on, so instead of all this effort we put in at the back-end of high school, it's about building those opportunities from early primary school on—opportunities around enterprise, innovation. It's about stimulating an environment with challenges and opportunities for young people. What we've got is a disconnect between the national curriculum, future industries and the skills that the existing labour market requires. Then we have teachers who are only as good as what they've been taught. And again, a whole heap of it is from a different time. We've got thousands and thousands of teachers that need to be upskilled. We have to get really, really focused on this, and it has to be a national priority. Number one.

Yeah.

I thought for a really long time I was unable to be educated, and that it was my problem. It was only since I started working with young people and became more involved in education and saw that there are heaps of things going on—from a systemic level through to the individual experience—that things needed to change. I've always been interested in systemic reform. When we set up CREATE in the 1990s it was the first time a group of young people in this country were given a voice, young people who might have lived in 30 different families and attended 10 different schools, and had never seen their siblings—a basic human right. One of the reasons we set up CREATE was so they could connect with people who had similar experiences.

The programs you've developed, they've made such a difference. And they seem to draw on what you went through as a young person. Did you have a vision then for the person you wanted to become?

Not really, but I think those three things—a strong sense of social justice, an entrepreneurial skill set and somebody telling me I was a leader—had coalesced by the time I finished school. Still, I had no idea what I wanted to do because the opportunities weren't there. I tried to study, that's what everyone in my family did, and then I got a job working with children and young people in drug and alcohol education, which connected me to more people and set me on my way. That's actually been a feature of my career. I've always worked with a co-founder or a team. I've rarely been a lone entrepreneur. I'm an extrovert. We do stuff in crowds. And I've always thought ideas are better and you get superior results, when you're working with other people.

So we started this guerrilla-style social entrepreneurship where we commandeered unused assets and spaces. There was an oil crisis in the '80s which resulted in all these abandoned petrol stations across Australia, and we took over a Shell servo in Brisbane and turned it into a massive drop-in centre for all these inner-city young people, many of them Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander. We took over the station and asked for forgiveness later, something that was well ingrained in me: to act first and ask for forgiveness later. So we eventually wrote to Shell and said, "By the way we've taken down the fences and taken over your servo for youth work," and they were pretty cool about it. We went on to do all kinds of guerrilla-style social entrepreneurship across the city.

I cut my teeth on street youth work and repurposing unused assets in the community, all the time getting grants to do it.

Amazing. What did you love about that work?

I guess I was always really passionate about providing people with opportunities and finding ways to achieve that with limited resources. It was mostly out of necessity than some well-constructed strategy or business plan! I loved working directly with those young people and their families. We were really close and I was more or less adopted by a huge Aboriginal family during that time. We spent an enormous amount of time together and I learnt and saw the complexity of these big extended families from rural Queensland moving to suburbia to access better opportunities for their kids.

How have the challenges facing young people changed since those days?

Some haven't. But the things that have are to do with the rapid changes in technology and information. There has always been ten to twenty percent of the community that has struggled for various reasons. Sometimes young people in care are part of that, sometimes it's indigenous people. I guess the thing I've come to notice more and more is that 80 percent of our young people are doing well, and the consequence of that is this untapped resource. What are we doing to tap into the potential of 80 percent doing well around creating, innovating and designing the future Australia we want to live in? It seems to me we have this great capacity that's locked up. We're not unleashing it. So we're running a campaign called "Innovation Nation: 1000 Ideas for a Better Australia." And we're going to curate thousands of ideas from young Australians, pick the top 50 to 100 and let them craft their projects with experts from relevant industries to help them. We want to showcase how

skilled and equipped our young people are at creating change quickly if you back them.

Yeah, because society doesn't do that enough. It doesn't place enough value on what young people can bring to the table. I hear a lot of stories from teachers about young people getting up and running the class when it comes to technology. Reverse mentoring.

I think anybody over 40 would be crazy not to have a mentor under 30 these days. Seriously, how could you survive in this world without it? I'm lucky I've got thousands of them. When we started CREATE we slaved away in the garage day after day—my poor kids—stuffing envelopes for 20,000 young people in foster care. A young person today can build a movement overnight. If they have the right messaging, the right approaches, for better or worse, they can mobilise millions of people. They have access to some of the most disruptive tools we've ever had. And they get it—this generation of young people has witnessed and experienced the power of these tools.

What does community mean to this generation?

I think we've been through a period of "I" and we've landed in "we." That's a powerful and incredibly important shift in our collective evolution. We're back at "we." I think finding people to build family and community with, to not try to go it alone, is an incredibly important message for young people. The almost pathological, individualistic era that we've come out of was so destructive on a mental health level and also for just getting shit done. The ability to find people to do real work with, to seek diversity in that and be motivated by different perspectives across different sectors, will reap the most innovative rewards.

It's such a contrast to the narrative we normally hear about this generation—that they're all about "me" and have no real sense of contributing.

I think young people are more active than they have been for decades. Everything I see and hear speaks against the common narrative that they're entitled, don't like hard work, are disinterested, narcissistic. I think it's pretty hard to argue that young people are entitled when we're in the most disruptive change the world has seen since the Industrial Revolution. For every university degree there is no guarantee of a job, and each person is going to have to craft their own opportunities. Most of those opportunities are going to be in large corporate institutions, freelancing or entrepreneurship. Work as it was and has been, and the sense of identity and contribution we derive from it, has changed forever.

Wow, that's kind of daunting. Especially for someone like me in his late 20s who has grown relatively used to traditional working environments. That it could all change like that is scary. What advice do you have for people as they venture into these unfamiliar waters?

Well, first, know thyself. And to that I mean, understand and follow your passions. Try stuff out. Your generation is going to be around for a long time. I always say, "You're going to be around for 100 years, you do actually have time."

The number one thing to try out is: who am I? What am I passionate about? It's so important to find that deep sense of yourself. From that comes your best creativity and your best work. It's about bringing your wellspring of talent and passion and creativity into the world.

Yeah.

The other thing I would say is, “Have a go, have a crack.” That’s the wonderful thing about being young, and being young in Australia: nothing can really go wrong. You can experiment. You can set up an enterprise with no capital and you can just have a crack. You can get your friends together and run a campaign, take up a challenge, be it for a day or a year.

The thing that prevents many young people from having a go is fear of failure, not having other people to do it with, and not having support networks. That’s why I think finding your tribe, being part of a larger community, is incredibly important. I always say to young people who have come together around a shared interest or experience: “Welcome, you’ve found your tribe.” It’s incredible to see their shoulders drop and their faces lift.

It makes me think that parents of this generation must have a lot to get their heads around too—with the way things are changing and all.

I think parents are in a really difficult position at the moment. They’re stuck about what they need to be doing for their children, what advice they should be giving them about their future, their education, their work. My view is the best thing you can do is de-risk your kids. I think parents have become risk averse, our country has become risk averse. A lot of that is to do with a heightened fear around this rapid change, but also with creating fear where there is no need for fear. It’s really important to change this by encouraging children to experiment and participate. The potential negative about young people staying home longer with their families is that they’re not getting out, working alongside others and really experiencing the world.

How do you do that? How do you get them off the couch, show them what they're missing?

It's about unlocking their passion. As parents we've got to help our children discover what they care about by listening to the things they pick up on at school and the media. Once you've helped them identify that passion, show them the various groups and activities they can get involved in. There are so many out there! Let them experiment! And celebrate those experiences they're having. That's how many of these Gen Yers have come to find meaning in their lives.

What else is it about this generation that makes you hopeful?

I just love that they're genuinely informed about the world. Way more informed than we think. They have access to more information than we could ever need, and possibly want, in some instances. But they're also looking for help and mentoring and guidance in understanding and applying that information. Once they do that, once they have the information, they're unstoppable. And I love that these young people have a strong sense of purpose. They are looking for meaning. They want a purpose to their life and to know how to make it real. I've also never seen a generation that is more informed and knowledgeable about the key issues of our time. Marriage equality and equality generally, along with gender and sustainability, are their key interests. This is also a generation that loves their parents and family more than any other generation. They're genuinely friends with their parents, and it's really interesting to see that difference. Part of it is housing affordability keeping them at home, but part of it is them actually liking their family.

Why has this generation got it right in this sense? Are the messages in the media different do you think? Are they more discerning?

I think they've got a high bullshit detector. My generation got the first magazines, we got Dolly and Cleo once a month and it was amazing. This generation has been saturated with, and also let down by, that media. The crazy focus on body image has really let young women down. Media at large has perpetuated issues like that, and I think young people have become more cynical as a result. I think this yearning for purpose and meaning means young people are going out and looking to craft their own adventure. And I think our role to help them is incredibly important. That's not how it works. We've got to back and invest in young people. It's not about unleashing them into the world and saying, "Go forth, make it all right. We're sorry we're delivering you climate change, we're sorry about poverty."

And I imagine that's been a big factor in the book you recently released, The Future Chasers, where you've profiled fifteen young leaders. Tell us about that.

We wanted to capture the ambition and sense of urgency that this generation of young leaders share. Each of them views the status quo as flawed, as not good enough. And each of them has a clear vision of the kind of future they want for the world and for themselves within it. They all have a passionate commitment to realising that future, and they all invest extraordinary amounts of time and energy into it. The book celebrates that. The ability of this generation to bring diverse disciplines together to create social change is astonishing. We've seen that happen in other industries, in building businesses for example, but never for social change,

never like this. Previously, social change was for social workers, aid and development workers, but this group coming through brings a plethora of disciplines. And we believed that these are stories that needed to be told.

Why these 15 Australians in particular?

Well, they're incredibly inspiring, they're smart and driven, they're fun. And they have what I call "stickability." All of them started when they were in their teens and they're now in their mid-20s. I wanted to bust that myth that Gen Y doesn't stick to things, that they flit around the place. This group has worked in different ways on their passions for a really long time.

How so?

There are people like Chris Raine, who came through a few years of binge drinking in his adolescence and university years and said, "That's not for me anymore." He turned that experience into an online organisation called Hello Sunday Morning, because he wanted to share the idea of reclaiming Sunday mornings. People will quit drinking for themselves—for fitness, weight loss, whatever—but rarely do we see someone inspiring tens of thousands of others to do the same. The book's full of those stories. Young people who go above and beyond. Of course that's not unique to this generation—that's what has always made a leader. What's unique is the speed at which this generation can move, and the disruption they can create, the number of people they can mobilise. When you look at Oaktree or the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, they are three times the size of any political party in this country. To all intents and purposes, they should be running the place!

I wonder what that would look like— an Australia governed by young people?

I often have a vision of our entire Senate being under 30. Every generation has an enormous responsibility for the generations to come. But the particular things we're dealing with now, around the future of the planet, are critical. And this generation recognises that.

To not have young people front and centre, not just for their ideas and token participation, but for their innovation and their ability to act and move in a really agile way, is such a mistake.

In the book you identify 15 different "types" of changemakers. What was the thinking behind that?

I wanted to show that a changemaker isn't one type of person. I wanted to show that being an activist, an architect, a commentator, someone who creates opportunities—they're all leaders. I went looking for the archetypes we need to create the future civil society. The book highlights identifiable character traits, so someone reading can connect with the changemakers and feel inspired that they too are having, or can have, an impact. I wanted to inspire the generation coming behind them especially—the 12 to 18 year olds—and show them there's not just one kind of person you have to be to make change. Not everyone is a maverick social entrepreneur like me who got kicked out of three schools. In fact, most of the future chasers did really well at school and university.

Do you see many parallels between yourself and this generation of changemakers?

Yeah, some things never change, right? I think that entrepreneurial spirit, that ability to back yourself, that confidence and self-belief—those are timeless universals. And

the ability to motivate others to bring out their best selves. I have a fantastic affinity with this group. We're the same in essence. I've just had more experience and a lot more scar tissue!

[Laughs]. I want to go back a bit to the early 90s when you were starting CREATE. What drew you to working with young people in foster care?

I was actually an adopted child myself and my parents were also short-term foster carers, so kids living apart from their biological families was always an issue that was close to my heart. I was working for *Save the Children*, running their women's domestic violence and residential foster care programs in Queensland, and I was confronted and outraged with how the young women in our care were forced to live as if they were the perpetrators of the abuse they experienced. We virtually had them under lock and key and they received very little information, education, support and access to opportunities—and yet they were the victims and the ones removed from family, friends and school while the perpetrators often stayed in their own environments. I heard about a national advocacy organisation in the UK, a consumer body of and for young people in care, and thought, *That's what we need in Australia.* We applied for a small grant and the rest, as they say, is history!

And you took in a foster child during that time who has been part of your family since.

Yeah. So Liz was homeless at 15 after a series of foster care placements had broken down. Very few people want to foster teenagers. I met Liz when we were setting up CREATE and she came to stay with us while the Department of Community Services was sorting out a placement for her.

They found one about six months later but by then she'd decided she wanted to stay with us. Our kids were much younger and they loved Liz, so we said "yes." Liz went on to become Young Australian of the Year in Queensland, gain degrees in teaching and psychology and have three children of her own. We're so proud of her and couldn't imagine her not being in the family.

You've been a mentor to so many. Who have been your mentors?

My entire life I have been surrounded by strong "feminist firsts." I went to a Catholic high school with nuns who broke the church's glass ceiling with Masters degrees and PhDs. As a child, my parents' church had the first ever female-ordained minister. As a teenager, one of my female mentors pioneered music as a form of youth work in churches across Australia. Then as a young mother and professional I was mentored by people like Dr Dale Spender and Dame Quentin Bryce. I've had the privilege of being surrounded by many, many strong women—and men as well—throughout my life, but it was the pioneering courage, tenacity and spirit of those women that really influenced and drove me. It continues to inspire me today.

What's the biggest lesson you've learnt?

Building teams, getting the right people on the bus and on the right seat at the right time. I think that's one of the hardest things to do.

As an entrepreneur, you can usually pitch and sell an idea, describe it vividly and compel people to join you, but formulating and getting the best out of a team and building the systems that are required around that are crucial.

I've learnt that over many years. Before I was at FYA I was at Social Ventures Australia, which was full of "corporate refugees" as I like to call them: ex-bankers, ex-lawyers, ex-management consultants… and me! Who'd come from the social sector! For the first six months we literally couldn't understand each other. I think that's changed massively in the last 12 years in Australia: people across sectors have found a way to communicate. For any entrepreneur, I think it's important to have the rigour of finance, strategy and operational systems around you. If you want to create enduring change you've got to build things that are enduring.

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Chapter Five

The Kinder, More Uplifting Side of the Internet

By Chris Anderson

Tired of the doom-scroll? This is how to find the kinder, more uplifting side of the internet

As a determined optimist, I never thought I'd be saying this, but it's true: the world is mean and getting meaner. Instead of bringing us together, the internet seems to have fuelled our divisions by empowering those who are best at sowing fear, mistrust and outrage. We're angry with each other over migrants, gender identity, climate catastrophe, wokeness and so much more.

A recent survey by King's College London found that for the first time a majority (52%) of the UK population believes that culture wars are a serious problem for society and politics. I'm sick of this. I suspect you are too. I've spent the last few years looking for an antidote. Just possibly, it can be found in a pair of human instincts wired deeply inside us: generosity, and our response to it. At the start of the pandemic

lockdown, stories of death, chaos and grocery-hoarding filled the media. Like many of us, an Australian woman, Catherine Barrett, felt on the edge of tears much of the time. One day, one of her neighbours put a box of tissues on the communal table in her building with just a simple note: "Please take if needed."

Barrett was deeply touched by the act. It gave her an idea. She created a new group on Facebook and posted a picture of the box of tissues and the neighbour's note. She wrote: "I'm setting this group up to spread kindness … to restore our faith in each other." She called her group the Kindness Pandemic. The group quickly grew to more than 500,000 people, with members from all over the world telling stories of kind acts they had witnessed or done themselves.
Barrett's group proved that simple acts of human kindness are happening around the world every moment of every day. But they are largely invisible to us, drowned out by headline-grabbing nastiness. Why do we do this to ourselves?

It's not as if the dark stories somehow reveal a deeper truth. Yes, it's awful that 100 people died in a violent incident today. But is that really more significant than the fact that more than 20,000 children's lives were *saved* today, and every day this year, thanks to the tireless efforts of tens of thousands of invisible public heath workers over the last three decades? Their remarkable generosity has led to the global infant mortality rate falling by 59% since 1990. By succumbing to the allure of the dramatic and the recent, we are inadvertently feeding ourselves a poisoned worldview. No wonder we feel sick.

What would it take for tales of kindness to eclipse tales of violence and fear and division? Here are three of the

catalysts that can help nudge acts of kindness across that chasm.

The first is simply emotion. Sometimes, the positive stories we share are told in the dry language of statistics or generalisations. The statistic above about the spectacular fall in preventable childhood deaths may have connected with you intellectually, but I doubt that it moved you. Yet if you were to sit down and watch the Carter Center You Tube video that shows what childhood Guinea worm disease looks like and how it is being eradicated, you would feel intense emotions—including dismay, disgust and deep gratitude. The numbers are incredible – a reduction from 3.5m cases in 1986 to just 13 in 2022 – but seeing for yourself a 2ft worm being pulled out of a screaming child is what will make you care. It's no wonder then that this video has been seen 18m times and has done as much as anything to alert the world to the incredible story of a horrifying disease being consigned to history.

Second, courage. Dylan Marron is used to haters on the internet. As a proudly progressive content creator, he made a series of social justice-oriented videos, covering topics such as police brutality and the controversies surrounding transgender people's use of public bathrooms. As the number of views soared, however, so did the aggressive comments from strangers.

Reeling from the barrage of hate, Marron developed an unexpected coping mechanism. He messaged a few of his trolls, asking if they would like to get on the phone with him. The result? He was able to find common ground. One 18-year-old troll who had told him he was a moron and that being gay was a sin turned out—like him—to have been bullied in school and to share Marron's love of the movie *Finding Dory.*

Third, creativity. The bolder, the better. A group of friends in Japan were sick of the litter on the streets of Tokyo. But instead of just going out there and tidying up, they decided to do so in a way that would get noticed. They dressed up as samurai warriors and used their acting skills to pick up the trash with drama and panache, grabbing discarded bottles with tongs, and flipping trash into the baskets on their backs. It's easy to understand why the videos of them in action have been seen by millions and attracted many to join the group.

We live at an incredible moment in history. It's possible today to give away knowledge, creativity, connection and enchantment at unlimited scale. It's also possible to amplify stories of other people's kindness like never before. Everyone can do this. Next time you are on social media, look for someone somewhere who's sharing something positive—anything from a kind comment to a gift of creative, uplifting content. There are so many of them out there. Like them. Repost them. Follow them. It will start to teach the algorithms controlling your feed that you are not the person they thought you were. And it may help lift this content into other people's feeds. The ripple begins.

Chris Anderson is the founder of Future Publishing
and the head of TED. His latest book
is Infectious Generosity
From The Guardian March 4, 2024

Chapter Six

Wisdom From Women Changemakers

By Kristen Zimmerman, Shawna Wakefield, and Rufaro Gwarada

A note from Adrienne Maree Brown:

Shawna Wakefield is passionate about collaborative work and collective thinking, as well as a member of the Fire Ensemble, which was the first choir to perform my debut public musical ritual, To Feel a Thing: A Ritual of Emergence*. Shawna and the co-authors of this piece, Kristen Zimmerman and Rufaro Gwarada, are the core team of Root. Rise. Pollinate!*

In the summer of 2023, we at Root. Rise. Pollinate! began to gather feminist changemakers from across the globe into an embodied storytelling project to tell the story of the future. We invited them to play with us and bring their hopes, love, and visions into our virtual circle in multiple sessions. Together, during one of the sessions, we wove a particular story, a fable—excerpted below—across time zones, cultures and generations:

And so the other children asked, “Well, could we be visitors? Is there a way to share this place that wouldn’t intrude?” Ursula thought about it, and she looked to the trees and the path, and she asked Water. And Water said, “Yes, please bring the visitors. Remind them to bring their heart, make their offerings, and connect in their own ways. Yes, bring them.” So the children went to this place and they saw the beautiful little stream. As they sat, everybody was very quiet, until Ursula turned and asked, “Is everybody OK?” And Sister said, “Yes, but somehow it’s like we didn’t know Water before, and now we see her in a different way. We see more than we ever could.” And they thanked her for bringing them to this special place.

The deliciously nonlinear process of weaving this story together allowed us to feel, see, taste, and touch the world we long for—for our descendants, ancestors, and, yes, ourselves.

Speculative, embodied storytelling is especially important now, given the level of uncertainty, conflict, and collective grief many of us are experiencing. Climate disruption has us literally navigating uncharted waters and unprecedented weather. Powerful new technologies, for healing and war, are evolving faster than we can grasp or govern them. Conflict is pervasive and escalating. Various anxieties haunt us and are amplified: disconnection, isolation, and loneliness; the specter of new deadly diseases; eco-anxiety; economic uncertainty; disregard for the life and well-being of the perceived “other”; displacement and lack of safe, consistent housing; concerns for our families’ and communities’ futures.

Yet all is not lost. We need not brace ourselves and hold our collective breath. Instead, we can take low and slow

breaths into our bellies, knowing that more people are remembering our right relationship to each other, to Water, Earth, Fire, and Air—sensing this is a crucial moment to leap into ways of being that foster repair, interconnection, and mutual thriving.

The paradox of this time feels both new and ancient. What might it look like to belong—to ourselves, each other, and Earth—unconditionally? How might we remember what we've forgotten? How do we sit in paradox and use it to evolve together?

Women leaders, organizers, and healers have helped their communities contend with these questions for generations. Root. Rise. Pollinate! started gathering such feminist changemakers—whom we call "pollinators"—early in the COVID-19 pandemic because we knew they could support mutual thriving in the middle of collapse.

Now, years later, we find it even more important to commit to collective practices that generate hope, love, care, and community. Our current work in progress, *Reports From a Revolution of Being*, uses embodied storytelling to help pollinators be present in paradox, dream together, and apply those dreams daily in service of our collective evolution. Three core practices are emerging as essential to this evolution: Courageous Presence, Radical Imagination, and Embodied Adaptation.

Practice 1: Courageous Presence

I don't like the word "resistance." I like the word "courageous presence." What is courageous presence? It means you've really accepted the challenge given to you and you have developed through it ... surrounded by people that

understand the different parts that feed the whole soul and strengthen the body and mind for that challenge. —Elder Kathy Sanchez (Tewa Women United)

The practice of speculative, embodied storytelling calls us to be present with the world *as it is right now.* This isn't easy, but it's powerful. As human beings, and activists, various habits protect us from seeing and experiencing the "muchness" of the world—repetitive unconscious behaviors like (but not limited to) retreating into or entrenching in that which is most familiar or (over)indulgence in any number of things. The unconsciousness with which we engage in these habits also separates us from our core power. We lose our ability to recognize and exercise our agency to face what is difficult and make choices to move away from the status quo toward something more hopeful, joyful, and rooted in love with courage.

In embodied storytelling we begin and end story circles with breath, body-based movement, and questions such as "How is your heart today?" By doing so, we bring our whole selves—heart, mind, body, spirit—forward in preparation for the stories we might weave. We practice courageous presence, rooted in love of ourselves, our people, and places, while opening to the complexity of our present conditions and the possibility to transform them.

Practice 2: Visioning the Arc

Our work as a movement is to create the conditions in which governance is loving. We don't just want loving organizations, we want loving communities. We want the bloody state of the world to be loving ... which is ultimately where we are trying to go with power. —Jessica Horn

Storytelling is the foundation of transformative strategy. It enables us to envision new, unexpected possibilities rooted in powerful, ancient truths. Pollinators weave a story together, generating ideas and energies that are hard to access when we are in more linear planning or evaluation modes. Through this playful practice we often surface key elements of vision, purpose, and strategies faster than when in those more linear modes. We connect the many layers of ourselves and our worlds with more ease. Some of the most powerful stories we created brought in the complexities of life, rather than a sanitized utopia. Through this practice we are seeding and growing power that is rooted in our imaginations, our interconnectedness, and the things we love.

Practice 3: Embodied Adaptation

The power of this work is as a driver of movement building ... [so that] we do it in a way that fuels and strengthens the collective.—Shereen Essof

A revolution of being is about embodying the change we want to see in the world—without compartmentalizing the change. A revolution of being enables us to live wholeheartedly, with purpose as our imperfect selves in our imperfect world. Practice is the path.

As we engage in a revolution of being, we develop our capacity to keep our visions alive, to establish courageous presence, and to make choices and adjustments in response to inevitable change based on what is really important. We expect to learn and practice as we go.

Stewards of the Future

Each of us is trying to build a better future through collective learning. Each of us is both a learner and a teacher. —Pam Ki Mela

As stewards of the future, we are part of a longer arc, connected to our ancestors and descendants. A revolution of being will look different in each place and with each group of people, but it will share some similarities: the deep love for home, an unshakable sense of belonging, and an awareness of our interconnectedness with all living things.

Join us in discovering a revolution of being!

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Kristen Zimmerman is a writer, artist and world-builder based in Oakland, California. They are currently an Adjunct Professor at California State University East Bay, teaching narrative illustration and comics. They hold an MFA in comics from California College of Arts, and a B.A. from Brown University. Kristen co-founded and directed numerous projects that apply world-building practices to real-world transformation, including: Root. Rise. Pollinate!, The Transitions Network, Decolonize Race, Movement Strategy Center, Youth In Focus, and Community LORE. Their writing and comics have been published by *Autostraddle, The Reverb*, Movement Strategy Center, *Electric Squeak,* the *Gender and Development Journal*, and other outlets. Before children, they worked as a producer for Pacifica Radio (KPFA), covering cultural affairs. Their debut graphic novel, *Ten Thousand Beloved Communities*, was published in 2023 by Beloved Communities Press. Some of their happy places are hanging out with their modern queer family, training in zen, spending

time in nature and making really good food with friends.

Rufaro Gwarada is committed to a world animated by *unhu* (*ubuntu*)—the understanding that collective and individual wellbeing are one and the same. She is a mama, writer, International Coaching Federation certified coach, facilitator, and organizer, with more than 15 years working for gender justice, migrant rights, African-led solutions for Africans, and utilizing art and cultural expression as conduits for healing, liberation, and joy. Rufaro is co-director for Root. Rise. Pollinate!, founder and principal of Pamuuyu, a coaching and consulting practice, and cofounded culture-shift initiatives Wakanda Dream Lab and reSet. Rufaro is home in Zimbabwe, Oakland, and Sacramento, California, with Sangha, on the dance floor, and among creatives and those who strive for liberation of all peoples.

Shawna Wakefield is committed to cultivating joyful, trusting relationships for loving power. She is a facilitator, teacher, and strategist who helps social justice leaders and their groups infuse complex work and lives with care, compassion, and ease. She is a mama, embodiment practitioner, and adjunct professor on gender, race, power and international development. She has a master's degree in public Administration from Columbia University, School of International and Public Affairs. She worked for Oxfam for a decade, the United Nations, and for smaller, grassroots organizations working for immigrant rights, gender, racial and economic justice.

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Chapter Seven

Softness

Soft Rebellion is the mycelial strategy of weaving beneath the surface, unsettling rigid structures with slow, persistent entanglement. It does not meet violence with a mirrored fist but with the supple intelligence of the willow, bending just enough to redirect the force and send it spiraling elsewhere.

Soft Rebellion is the way water carves stone—not through brute force but through patient insistence, through intimate knowledge of the cracks, through the whisper of time.

Its strategies are those of the trickster, the lover, the root and the reed. It listens before it moves, feeling into the hidden weaknesses of oppressive systems, understanding that no empire, no ideology, no monolith is without its fractures. It knows that control is a brittle thing, and that softness—fluid, adaptable, decentralized—is far harder to extinguish than steel.

Soft rebellion doesn't look like a war cry. It looks like walking away. Like choosing to move at a different rhythm than the one demanded.

Soft rebellion is the mycelial antidote to the brittle, crumbling monolith of power. In the face of a slow-moving

coup—where democracy is gutted in broad daylight, where fear is the chosen currency of control—soft rebellion does not play by the rules of the oppressor. It moves beneath, between, beyond. It resists not with brute force, but with the cunning of ecosystems, the resilience of roots breaking concrete.

Soft rebellion understands that the systems tightening their grip on power want us exhausted, divided, reactive. It knows that despair is an instrument of control, that urgency is often a trap.

So instead, it cultivates deep, embodied resistance—rebellion that does not just fight against but builds towards.

— Shannon Willis
The Mycelial Art of Soft Rebellion
Excerpted in Kosmos Journal

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Softness is one of the great secrets of all spiritual practice. When we become soft, we become like water. We let life come to us. We trust in its flow, and we allow ourselves to be taken in whichever direction it chooses. This is true power because it comes from love, and love is the softest thing in the universe, and yet it is the most powerful. When you soften your attitude to yourself, to others, and to life, you release the natural wisdom that lies within you. Through softness, you find clarity and purpose without needing to force anything. Your life becomes a gentle unfolding rather than a constant battle.

— Richard Rudd
from Awakin.org

This short piece generated many comments
when it appeared online; below are a few:

The passage *The Softening* authored by Richrd Rudd is very illuminating to me. It reminds me of the saying *Simple Living And High Thinking*. Our simple living can be enriching and fulfilling. Our basic needs to survive and enhance our living are very few. Sadly we are not content with what we have. We ask for more and more material things and possessions. We believe the more we have, the more merry and happy we will be. The thirst for having more possessions is rarely quenched. The more possessions we have the less we become fulfilled. We need to be aware of this hunger and thirst for more material possessions. There is no end to this thirst. Before I came to the US, we were relatively poor. However, we had inward richness, inner wealth of peace, joy, fulfillment and gratification. When I came to the richest country in the

world I saw inward poverty. I believe in living a balanced life. Living in a balanced way I feel happy, peaceful and fulfilled. I believe there is light of awareness within all of us. This light helps me walk on the path of natural wisdom. However, there are times when I do not remain awake and create suffering in me and others close to me. I wake up from my sleep, remain awake and walk on the path. As I am getting older, I remain more awake and walk steadily on the right path, the path of natural wisdom. May we all join each other's hands and walk on the path of awareness. This is my prayer. Amen. Namaste.

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This is a sweet validation for me. For some weeks, I have been practicing 'No resistance and no insistence'. This is an antidote for me to fight years of conditioning of being excellent, hard-working, punctual, in control of the outcomes, efficient, productive, and whatnot. I remind myself of the river when I get stuck somewhere. The river does not resist the boulders, never does it insist. It just figures out the way, sometimes from around the boulders, sometimes taking them along, it just knows to flow. When a negative emotion grips me, I don't try to fight it out nowadays as I used to do earlier. Nor do I victimize myself, I will just be there. And wait for the emotion to get over, having some time alone helps. Softening makes me listen to the silence inside.

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I am beginning to pay attention to my reactiveness and return to my breathing and my mantra of “I forgive myself, I forgive everybody and everything else” and I will take the time to "soften" more today, to allow myself to find what my

heart and soul really want to say and discover what I really want

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The first thing that came to my mind was surrender. Most of my adult life was consumed with addiction. I had to surrender/softened in order to let life penetrate my soul. When I softened my grip and let go, I naturally experienced the miracles in life. I never realized that a life of love and compassion could be so strong yet soft..

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As I have moved into senior citizen hood , and thanks also to still prevailing traditions , I often sense a softness in the response of service providers and any public person i come across and request help from. Speaking of myself , a feeling of gratefulness and sufficiency in me helps to manifest softness towards others apart from the usual trigger of the vulnerability and innocence in the other person

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I am drawn to softness....the softness found in feathers, my dog's fur, my granddaughter's long hair that I hold as I put it into a pony tail. Softness feels respectful to me. It allows for space. When I think of softness with people, soft eyes come to mind. Eyes that see clearly and yet eyes that are kind, receptive and understanding....perhaps compassionate is the word. I open when around softness. I open my mind, heart, and my body relaxes. As I reflect on softness, the word 'peace' comes to mind..... it's a peaceful word.

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Rudd's statement is medicine for me. For me, softness means: allowing, being at ease, comfortable with my truth and

with what is, openness, acceptance of self and other and the situation, equanimity. Softness is not weak and not indifferent; softness is strong while being at ease and caring. I'm aware of still becoming more soft in general and more soft in my releasing the natural wisdom within. I have not been good at that . I'm critical. I'm a pusher and arguer. Softness may be the last attribute I consider spiritual to be developing in me, and I think it is a fundamental one. For me to be soft it seems necessary for me to be conscious of being soft, being calm, gently unfolding instead of being in a constant battle. I remind myself to be soft, and sometimes am that way. After years of attention to emotional and spiritual growth, softness is the most difficult for me to embody and be.

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What helps me gently unfold is meditation and coming back to my breath. Softening to what emotions emotions come up, softening to just being there to listen to someone, softening to look at the beauty around me, softening to see beauty, pain, loss, suffering, joy, and happiness in others. It's all part of this existence. If we can alleviate suffering in someway, we must try.

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What I discovered when I had cancer, that accepting help from others brought them joy. Accepting help was not a sign of weakness but came from acceptance. Being soft can be a sign of true strength. Being vulnerable is admitting being human and connects me to those around me in a deep and meaningful way. Softness

Chapter Eight

The Nature of Divine Light

by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

The nature of The Light... is that it comes direct from the Source, from the undifferentiated Essence. It awakens us to an awareness of the oneness and multiplicity of creation, and the primal need for praise and thanksgiving. With this light we can return to the wonder of the first day—to the song of creation that is alive in the love within our hearts.

Walking alone on the beach, the waves rolling in from across the Pacific, the sun shining through the early morning haze, I thought it would be helpful if I explained more about the nature of the light about which I have spoken so much.

This light, known to the Sufis as the Muhammadan light, or al-Nur al-Muhammadi, is the first expression of the undifferentiated Essence, even as it is also identical to It. According to Ibn ‘Arabi the creation began with this light. Thousands of years ago a quality of this light was given as a gift directly to Homo sapiens, awaking them from a solely instinctual existence, giving them the gift of consciousness. They were awakened to the reality of the Divine, both within them and in the world around—at that time there was no

separation between the two. This gift of light, of divine consciousness, is sometimes mythically imaged as fire stolen from the gods, but nothing was stolen. It was given as a gift from the world of light, from the Divine.

This gift of consciousness made these early human beings aware of the world in a new way, as a magical living being to which they belonged, all part of the One Spirit. Because this light comes directly from the Source, they were able to see the world in its divine nature, numinous and alive in wonder. And while previously Homo sapiens, like the rest of the created world, had only a survival instinct, now they also had the need for praise and thanksgiving, as they recognized the divine wonder of the world into which they were born. This is how it was for the First Peoples, who lived as small groups of hunter-gatherers.

And because there was no separation between the earliest humans and the world around them, because they lived in a primal state of oneness with all of creation, the light that was given to them was also a gift to the Earth Herself. They awoke together. This was the beginning of a new chapter in the evolution of the Earth. The undifferentiated, unchanging Essence gave Its gift of light—of divine consciousness—to humanity and to the Earth, and so they walked and sang and danced and dreamed together. This was the beginning of the Dreaming, when the undifferentiated consciousness of the Earth and humanity created the songlines of the Earth and of the souls of early peoples.

This light contains the divine consciousness of humanity and of the Earth, and at that time there was no separation between them. Later, much later, a separation developed, and the One Light would become experienced as

two: as a transcendent light, the lumen dei, and a light within creation, the lumen naturae of the alchemists. But at the beginning it was all One Light alive within the souls of humanity and within creation, experiencing and praising the many forms of the world, of the One Spirit. In this light, in this dawning awareness, there were both one and many.

This light also contained the blueprint, the instructions for humanity and the Earth, known to the First Peoples as the Original Instructions. This is the blueprint for the way the Earth and humanity can evolve together and continue this primal process of awakening. And the first humans instinctively knew these Instructions; they were a part of their DNA. Later they became articulated into myths and stories, into different ways of prayer and praise. But in the early years it was as natural as sunlight. Humanity and the Earth were part of a dance of revelation.

Another quality of this light was that it knew and communicated the names of creation. Everything that is created has a name, written in the book of life. This name contains the meaning and divine purpose of each being, its true nature. The essence of every animal is known in its name, as is the essence of every fruit and flower, tree and river. The dawning of consciousness brought an awareness of these names, and so humanity was able to recognize and relate to the true nature of everything. In the Qur'an (2:31) it is written that

He taught Adam the names
Of all things

meaning that Adam was taught the inner nature and qualities of things.[1] And so the first man had knowledge of the names

of creation, which belong to the divine "secrets of heaven and earth" (Qur'an 2:33).[2]

There was a knowing present then that has now become deeply hidden—a knowing of the sacred purpose of creation, of its beauty and wonder. And this knowing was coming alive, speaking to human beings in all the myriad voices of the world around, in the streams and storms, in the cries of the birds and the animals, in the first language of life. As David Abrams describes it, "for the Inuit, as for numerous other peoples, humans and animals all originally spoke the same language." He quotes an Inuit woman: "In the very earliest time, when peoples and animals lived on earth… all spoke the same language. That was the time when words were like magic…. Those who are recognized as shamans or medicine persons most fully remember the primordial language, and are thus able to slip, at will, out of the purely human discourses in order to converse directly with the other powers."[3]

Today we think of the earliest human beings in their struggle for survival, and have long forgotten the wonder of an awakening Earth, and how our ancestors were part of its magic and mystery, even though we can see traces of this, for example, in the earliest cave paintings in Southern France, where some of the animals have a shamanic dimension. There was a numinous quality present then which our memories censored long ago. But the gift of light brought this living oneness into humanity's dawning awareness, along with the wonder of the multiplicity of the created world, the many colors of creation coming from the single Source of pure light.

And the divine purpose of creation remains present in this light, the light of the soul and the World Soul, even if we have buried it over the millennia, have told ourself other

stories. It is present within everything, the hummingbird in the garden, the coyote on the trail—present in their life force together with their own instinct for survival. It is why I like to walk in the wetlands, where I can watch this light, feel its presence and hear its story, so different to the toxic noise of the world around. It is in the simple beauty of the heron bending her long neck as she reaches underwater for a fish. This light and its beauty cannot be contaminated. It is too pure, its vibration too fast. It is the Source alive, a direct connection to the unborn and undying Essence. It is the Divine within the world still constantly speaking to us, even if we mostly forgot how to listen long ago.

The story of the Earth and the story of humanity separated many centuries, even millennia, ago, and now are told in different languages. Today they seem in conflict with each other as our human story destroys the ecosystem, poisons the rivers, clear-cuts forests, and makes species extinct. But if one returns to this original gift of pure awareness, particularly with a heart open to love, the Original Instructions are still present in it. And because the Source is constantly changing and evolving, even as it remains unchanging, the instructions have also changed. There are new ways of praise and thanksgiving, new ways to return to an awareness of a magical Earth, for example, what I have called a deep ecology of consciousness.

All that is needed is a return to the love that is present within the heart and within all of life.[4] The light is stronger than all of our powers of forgetfulness, and because it is present outside of time it is not contaminated by our history and its patterns of abuse. It is present in the everywhen of the

Aboriginal Peoples, where the Dreaming still continues. This is the nature of the light that is given.

The Light in the Heart

It is also important to recognize that for the mystic this light has a personal quality. Spiritual life is a journey that begins with an awakening of the love and light[5] of our divine nature, which then draws us back to the Source. This awakening is always an act of grace, a gift in which the divine light enters our spiritual consciousness, turning our attention back to God. In Sufism this love becomes longing, the heart's cry calling us to love's infinite ocean, where, in Rumi's words, "swimming ends always in drowning." All sense of separation is dissolved as the lover merges with the Beloved and the essential oneness of Truth is revealed.

The same oneness that the First Peoples experienced in the world around them is awakened within the heart, as the light reveals to us our divine nature and the unity of being. On the Sufi path that I have followed, this light continues to be given directly into the spiritual heart of the wayfarer, given as a transmission of divine love. This is the energy we need to continue on the journey, to travel from separation back to union.

And because this love comes directly from the Source, from the Greater Love to which we all belong, it knows our true name. We each have a name written in the book of life. This name contains our true purpose and spiritual destiny, the destiny of the soul rather than the ego. When we are first awakened our attention is turned from the ego—with its patterns of desires, successes and failures—to the destiny of the soul, which concerns our real evolution. This is the way

we can look towards God and also the way to be of service in the world, as Sufism is a path of service. We aspire to be the servants of God, whose favorite name is the servant of servants.

The light and love given through the path align us with this deeper purpose, and it is individual for each of us, which is why one of the early dreams I had was finding a pot for my teacher that could cook one egg at a time. We are each a unique expression of the Divine, of the Great Artist for whom each creation cannot be repeated. And while in our ego-existence we are often caught in the patterns of the collective, the journey home is different for each of us, a journey from the alone to the Alone. And because the love and light that are given contain the mystery of oneness and multiplicity, we are each given a different quality and quantity of this love, each according to our true nature—even as the love reveals the unity of being to which we belong.

When I stopped teaching a few years ago, I explained to those who had sat with me for a number of years that they had each been individually given what they needed to complete their soul's journey. At the time I do not think that many understood what I meant. But spiritually it was very simple. As long as the individual had sat with me long enough and had done the initial work of creating a container within the heart and psyche, they were given a quality of light and love directly into their heart, into their higher spiritual centers, that could take them home. It was written with their name and the name of God into their hearts. It was a very direct process.

The love and light belong to a dimension of oneness even as it flows into multiplicity. This energy is always present at the Source even as it comes alive in the many forms of

creation, or in this instance in the many hearts of those present in the room. Because, as I have shared, I had been taken into the world of light, I could give this to all those who sat with me. They would need nothing more spiritually for the remainder of their incarnation; all that was required was to continue with their practices and live according to the principles of the path. This was my gift.

The Two Worlds

It is important to understand that the nature of this light —the spiritual essence within creation and within our heart— is very simple, in contrast to the increasing complexity of our present culture. It is the One Light alive within the world and within our heart, a light that belongs to oneness and does not know separation. This light sings our individual name as well as the name of everything that is created, alive in the first language of life.

That we have forgotten these names is one of the unspoken tragedies of human history, as without knowing our name we cannot find our way. But returning to the heart and to the light within the heart we are present in that moment in and out of time where there is no past or future, just a quality of being that belongs to our essential nature. The journey is then for us to simply remain with this feeling, this inner orientation, and allow it to take us back where we belong.

Today so many of the stories we are told are false, lies built upon lies. They come from a civilization that has lost its way. It has even forgotten that our world is one single being in which spirit and matter are not separate. It speaks of a universe being born from a Big Bang almost fourteen billion years ago, without understanding how matter is spirit made

manifest, how everything was created from the pre-existing light. But around us there is another story being told, told in a myriad of forms full of beauty in which the earliest starlight is still present. This is a world in which a divine consciousness is constantly evolving, telling its story again and again. And we are a part of it, our own individual consciousness a spark in this greater unfolding.

In these stories I have told of this light, how it has been hidden from us and how it is being revealed. The first day does not just belong to some distant past; it belongs to a spark of divine light within the heart, a feeling of love for the Earth. The work of the mystic has always been to stay true to this light, this love, to be a part of this axis that spins in every atom of creation.

In the early days of the pandemic, when I wrote "When the Source Ran Free," I also wrote a few words for mystics and lovers,[6] because I feel with a passion deep in my heart that we have a central part to play in the world, in the unfolding mystery of love called life:

With our prayers and our practices, with the remembrance of the heart and the song of a soul going home, we carry the mystical light of the world, we live this essential truth. In the words of a Christian mystic:

Each creature God made
Must live its own true nature;
How can I resist my nature,
That lives for oneness with God?[7]

The work of those who are drawn back to God by the thread of divine love is simple: to live this calling in the midst of life.

As the world turns we stay true to this essential axis of love that runs through every day, through all of creation. Without this journey being lived, without this song of the soul being heard, a color woven into the fabric of life would be lost, a note no longer heard. We belong to life and we belong to the Divine, and as we live this belonging with our prayers and devotions, with the breath of our body and passion of our heart, we keep alive the consciousness of divine love, the spark in the heart of the world. I cannot stress too much the value, the significance, of living, of breathing, this simple truth, especially at this time of outer turbulence.

The journey continues, the journey always continues. And since the very beginning there have been souls, men and women of all races, called on this journey, drawn by love back to love, called to rediscover the essential oneness of lover and Beloved, the union of divine love. They have been called by many different names in different places and times; they are servants of God, lovers of God, mystics, fools of divine love. But these are just words for a mystery that takes place first deep within the heart, and then spreads to every cell of the body, to our thoughts and feelings, to our dreams, to the way we place our feet on the ground.

Do not forget, do not ever forget, this mystery of divine love, this cry of the heart, this longing of the soul. We are engaged in outer life—as Rumi says "I am the pain of the sick"—and we help where we can, always in service to life, in service to love, in service to our Beloved. And we always stay true to this calling of the soul, this thread of love that draws us Home. While the world lives many passions, we live this one passion, the tears, the heartache, and the bliss of divine love. While the world has many desires, we have this single desire,

to be with our Beloved. Whether we are marching against injustice, tending the sick, caring for our family, cooking a meal, or sitting in silent prayer, our heart is turned towards our Beloved, our Beloved's name is on our lips, love's remembrance is our duty and joy.

Today we live in the time of the great forgetting, when even the sacred nature of the Earth Herself is no longer a part of our collective consciousness. Long, long ago, the masters of light helped to awaken Homo sapiens and the Earth to an awareness of the Divine and the song of creation was heard for the first time. And now, when so many thousands of years have passed, the work of these masters is complete and a cycle of creation comes to a close—they have prepared humanity and the Earth for the next era of its evolution together. As a friend was shown in a dream a few years ago, just before he died, "He meets Llewellyn together with other disembodied great masters. The masters explain to him, that they now would have given and reflected the divine light to the whole Earth and to every being (humans, animals, and all other beings). Now this work is completed."

The light of divine oneness, the unity of being, has been infused into all of creation. The next step for humanity is to take responsibility for our relationship with the interdependent living oneness of the biosphere; and, for those who are spiritually awake, for the light within creation—its sacred nature. We cannot return to the instinctual oneness of the First Peoples who still lived in the garden in harmony with the One Spirit, before the Fall, but nor can we afford to remain in this increasing wasteland caused by our greed and exploitation, our forgetfulness of the Original Instructions. Just as there comes a time on the path when the individual has to take responsibility

for their own journey—the light and love that is given—so is it for the whole of humanity: to take responsibility for our relationship to the living Earth and our journey together.

The work now is to tend the seeds of living oneness that have been planted into our hearts and into the world around us, as we transition this liminal space between eras. To nurture them with our love and care for the Earth. So many thousands of years ago we were awakened to the wonder and magic of divine presence. And the same light that awoke in the Earth is what calls us back to love within the heart, so that the world should not forget. In my own life, since I was sixteen, I have tried to live this light: both in its moment-by-moment revelation in the outer world—the light shining, reflected on the waters of the world—and in the deepening mystery of the inner worlds. I have tried to share some of its secrets, even though words cannot capture its brightness. It is like a koan that breaks the patterns of the mind, too clear and simple to be understood, only grasped. I hope that it has found its way through the spaces between my words, places that have been left empty. I do know that it is present in the heartbeat of the world, and this morning it greeted me in the sunlight after the fog.

— Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
The Golden Sufi Center
www.goldensufi.org

1. In the Bible, Genesis 2:20, Adam was authorized by God to give the creatures of creation their names—"And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field." In Hebrew adam means "human," and in Sufism Adam is the essential human being.
2. According to Ibn 'Arabi this knowledge of the names was transmitted through the succession of perfect human beings: "The perfect human beings never ceased receiving the names from one another until the names finally reached the Greatest Master, Muhammad." Chittick, The Self Disclosure of God, p. 154.
3. David Abrams, The Spell of the Sensuous, p. 87–88.
4. Love and light are here synonymous, as love is a direct emanation of the uncreated Source, and the consciousness of the heart knows the unity of being present in the multiplicity of creation.
5. See note 4 above.
6. A Return to Love, June 2020.
7. Mechthild of Magdeburg, Meditations from Mechthild of Magdeburg.

Chapter Nine

Could Gratitude Be Healing for Democracy?

By Courtney Martin

You've likely heard this before:
gratitude is not just good manners, it's good for us.
It unshackles us from toxic emotions.
It reduces depression and anxiety.
It even cuts down on the number
of physical aches and pains one reports.

In light of new research I've recently learned about, I'm wondering if gratitude might also have the power to push us in the direction of a healthier democracy. Here's the deal: researchers Elizabeth Mancuso and her colleagues have found that feeling gratitude actually leads people to be more intellectually humble.

Intellectual humility, as I've written about before, is the ability to right size yourself in a given situation—to take up more space when you know a lot about a topic and less when you accurately self-assess that you have less to offer than

others in the room—whether literal or proverbial, as in the case of social media. Intellectual humility is not a fixed trait—though some of us have greater tendencies towards it. It's a muscle, a mindset, a way of moving through the world that has huge value—especially in this moment of such profound polarization, media disinformation, and damaging certainty.

So, if this is true—that feeling and expressing gratitude helps us move towards an openness to really listening to others and considering that we could be wrong about things, it seems we're been doing civic conversation all wrong. When was the last time you heard someone express any gratitude for the parts of our democracy that *are* working well, or at least comparatively well compared to other countries? When was the last time that you heard someone express gratitude for the more proximate fruits of democracy functioning even marginally well, like public schools, libraries, transportation?

This is not to argue that we should be only focusing on the public systems or political freedoms that we do have, or pretending that their current state is satisfying to any of us. Gratitude can feel like such a hollow mandate. I get it. As poet Kaveh Ahkbar writes in his new novel, *Martyr!*, "It's possible, he thought, that the experience of gratitude was itself a luxury, a topless convertible driven through a rainless life."

But gratitude shouldn't be the province of young, scarless yoga instructors or vanity celebrity magazines. It is ours. All of ours. No matter how rain filled our life has been, I believe gratitude can and should be a birthright. And it may be easier for us to wrestle with our political differences, build real solutions for real communities, and reweave our civic fabric if we focus—at least as we are able and genuinely willing to—on what we are grateful for about our shared polity.

I feel like those of us who lean left are particularly likely to shun gratitude as romantic and soft. If we express gratitude, we worry, then we cede ground to the right, who is pretending that everything was better back in the *Mad Men* era. We don't want to make America great again! America was never great in the first place! We show our love through incessant criticism.

But, actually, America is great in many, many ways. It is also deeply broken and hypocritical and in need of reform, and yes, dissent. Critique is a robust form of patriotism in my book, but so too is love and celebration and awe.

I think about this with public schools a lot. It's de rigueur to talk shit about how dysfunctional our district and our public schools here in Oakland are. And trust me, I've got plenty of things I could share, myself, having survived many a teacher strike, the pandemic, and approximately one million

meetings that devolve into an educational funding version of Sophie's choice—*do we hire more reading or math tutors because we can only afford one or the other?* It makes me want to scream, and on occasion I have—in my car, alone, or with a neighbor who is equally outraged.

But you know what I can't abide by? Spending so much time talking amongst ourselves and to others out in the community about how badly run our district is and/or our schools are such that we collectively lose confidence in this, the most sacred and democratic of all public projects—educating our children together. I also can't abide by spending so much time talking about what is going wrong that we don't acknowledge and build on what is going right; at our beautiful, imperfect school, that's reading growth and teacher retention and the fabulous programs focused on affirming and supporting our Black students.

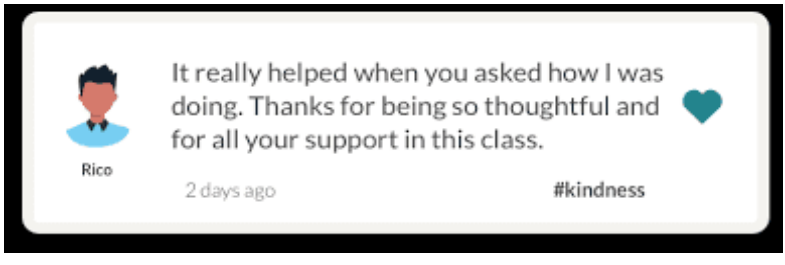
I'm reminded of GiveThx, a "digital program and research-validated curriculum that strengthens student wellbeing and social-emotional skills through gratitude." Basically, from what I understand, GiveThx infuses a whole school community with gratitude, by explicitly teaching gratitude practices, but also by integrating an app that allows students to send digital thank you notes to one another and school staff. Educators also experience more ritualized and routine gratitude coming to them, as they should—what a huge, dynamic, hard job!

The kinds of notes students can send one another on GiveThx:

I'm also reminded of former superintendent Marlon Styles, who I profiled in this piece I wrote awhile back for *The Christian Science Monitor*, who did a brilliant thing to counter the trend of negativity in his own community; he invited a group of multi-sector, multi-racial leaders to be his designated "positive gossipers." He promised to share the good, bad, and ugly with this once a quarter, if they promised to be voices out in the community sharing some of what was going right in our schools. It proved hugely successful in turning the cultures of the schools around, and also helped him lean on long-developing relationships when the culture wars landed on his doorstep.

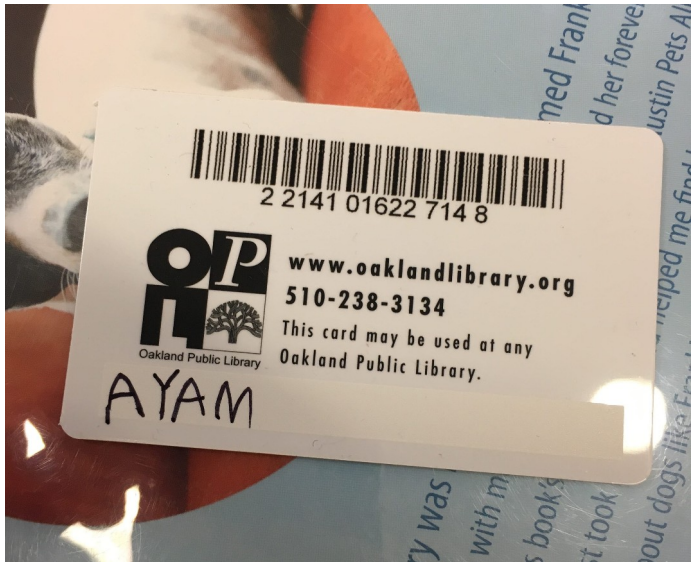
What if we were "positive gossipers" for public institutions and infrastructure? What if we spent time each week thinking and talking about how grateful we are for what works in our communities, our states, and even our shared, ailing nation? What if we spent as much time pitching in as we do worrying, complaining, criticizing, and finger-pointing?

I can tell you that I'm outrageously grateful for the Rockridge Public Library where I have gone with my kids since they were tiny and Stella has picked out all the terrible Berenstain Bear books and Maya all the weird fact books, and we have never once had an accident even though it feels like



we are always racing to the bathroom, and the librarians never make us feel back about returning our books overdue. I can tell you that being among a smattering of humanity and being able to gaze down out of the windows of BART as we slide in and out of West Oakland station is better than an amusement park ride to me. I can tell you that being a journalist in a country where I may be underpaid, but never jailed, for what I write is a comfort I don't think often enough about.

Maya's first library card on which she spelled her name backwards:



If we could turn out attention to what's working, and maybe even express it, this research suggests that we might do a better job of acknowledging what it is we don't actually know. And that just might be the first step towards a more accurate, more durable, more just America.

Chapter Ten

A Charles Eisenstein Sampler

Excerpts from Charles Eisenstein Blog:

There are hidden angels among us. They hold the world together. Their words and actions radiate out into society, even into politics, through utterly mysterious paths.

This man did not calculate that his kind, jocular words to Allison were his highest-leverage, impact-maximizing use of his resources. He does not abide in that particular theory-of-change, or any theory-of-change. He isn't trying to figure out how to have a positive effect on the world. He doesn't have to.

There are many like him out there. They are usually to be found in the most humble stations. You probably have met a few, now and then.

Sometimes New Age teachers speak of "guardian races" protecting our planet, helping us through the current world-initiation. This is the form they take. They do not require anything from us, but we can amplify their work immensely through the power of gratitude and awe. These emotions open a channel to receive their soul force, which enters in and sets the stage for our own transition into a higher level of service by bringing down the obstacle of self-importance.

That's a key obstacle, because most of the things that need doing today, desperately need doing, will not accrue to the doer any kind of public recognition, reward, or credit. They will not usually seem "important" to the recognition of the political mind or the save-the-world mind. And when the "important" choice does arise—whether to press the launch button, perhaps—it is thousands of "unimportant" choices that create the template for what that choice will be.

Thank you to the great souls in humble stations holding our world together. Please take a moment to recall one to mind with awe and gratitude, so that we may be humbled to do the important work that awaits us.

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I invite you to enter as a guest into the House of Uncertainty just for a few minutes. We'll join here together in that House of Uncertainty, in the House of Unknowing, in the House of Unlimited Possibility, where our view of of the future, our view of the world stage is unclouded by our preconceptions.

We shall see. And we sit here in this uncertainty and in this unknowing, maybe actually even close your eyes. I will do so at this crossroads, this nexus point of many paths radiating out into the future.

Thank you. a momentary resting spot where in this moment we do not know what path we will take. Thank you. In this moment, you know that you will choose a path, that the moment for choice will come, that the choice will be revealed to you, but not now. That understanding will come, meanings will come, but not now. And so alongside whatever the

emotional generators of the stories were, the grief, the anger, the hope, the joy, whatever it was, alongside of all of those things, there's something else that you are aware of right now. It as a calmness, a light curiosity, and a serenity. Thank you. alive with possibility. And sometime in the next half a minute or so, you can please open your eyes again. And as you open your eyes, keep a lifeline to that feeling.

Serenity, curiosity, possibility. Not as a substitute for all of the other things that you're feeling that come from a valid place, but as a companion to them. So that, when this unforeseeable new information comes in, that will seriously challenge almost everybody, you'll be ready for it.

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The political revolution of 2024 will be no revolution at all, if it only exchanges one deep state for another, one delusion for another, one enemy for another (Iran instead of Russia), one target of dehumanization for another (trans people or immigrants instead of white straight males). The real revolution is a revolution of love. It is a revolution of peace. It is a revolution of healing. It is a revolution of forgiveness. Everyone knows this on some level, because it is obvious. You hear a real story of a migrant or a black mother or a rural white or a Monsanto executive or anyone whom ideology held in contempt, and the truth shines forth: you are my brother, you are my sister, if not for the grace of God, it would be me standing in your shoes. The revolution is to integrate this understanding into our systems and to run a planet on the basis of this truth. Let’s not pretend otherwise.

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How [the future] will turn out depends a lot on our choices right now. These are the fuel for the timeline manipulations in one direction or another. One way to look at it is that the malevolent entities... and their extraterrestrial and extra-dimensional allies, draw their power from the violence, hate, lies, cruelty, indifference, thoughtlessness, arrogance, and vanity the circulates among earth's population, while the benevolent Guardian races draw their power from our love, generosity, kindness, forgiveness, and devotion to beauty. We are not mere victims. We are all participants in the metamorphosis that is available in these times. The war for reality is not to be won with familiar weapons. In fact, the word "war" is much to small to encompass the drama we have entered.

— charleseisenstein.org
charleseisenstein.substack.com/

Chapter Eleven

A 600-Year-Old Blueprint for Weathering Climate Change

By Kathleen DuVal

During the Little Ice Age, Native North Americans devised whole new economic, social, and political structures.

Around the year 1300, the Huhugam great chief Siwani ruled over a mighty city near what is now Phoenix, Arizona. His domain included adobe-and-stone pyramids that towered several stories above the desert; an irrigation system that watered 15,000 acres of crops; and a large castle. The O'odham descendants of the Huhugam tell in their oral history that Siwani "reaped very large harvests with his two servants, the Wind and the Storm-cloud." By Siwani's time, Huhugam farms and cities had thrived in the Sonoran Desert for nearly 1,000 years. But then the weather refused to cooperate: Drought and flooding destroyed the city, and Siwani lost his awesome power, driven away by an angry mob.

Siwani was one of many leaders across North America in the 13th and 14th centuries who, in part because of climate

change, faced destruction of the civilization they ruled. Beginning in the 13th century, the Northern Hemisphere experienced a dramatic climatic shift. First came drought, then a period of cold, volatile weather known as the Little Ice Age. In its depths, the annual average temperature in the Northern Hemisphere may have been 5 degrees colder than in the preceding Medieval Warm Period. It snowed in Alabama and South Texas. Famine killed perhaps 1 million people around the world.

Native North Americans and Western Europeans responded very differently to the changes. Western Europeans doubled down on their preexisting ways of living, whereas Native North Americans devised whole new economic, social, and political structures to fit the changing climate. A common stereotype of Native Americans is that, before 1492, they were primitive peoples who lived in tune with nature. It is true that, in the 1400s, the Indigenous people of what is now the United States and Canada generally lived more sustainably than Europeans, but this was no primitive or natural state. It was a purposeful response to the rapid transformation of their world —one that has implications for how we navigate climate change today.

Both Native North Americans and Western Europeans had taken advantage of the Medieval Warm Period, which began in the 10th century and ended in the 13th century, by farming more intensively. Compared with the preceding centuries, the era brought relatively predictable weather and a longer growing season that allowed new crops and large-scale agriculture to spread into colder climes: from central Mexico to what is now the United States, and from the Levant and

Mesopotamia to Western Europe, Mongolia, and the Sahel region of Africa.

In both North America and Western Europe, agricultural expansion allowed population growth and urbanization. Native Americans built grand cities on the scale of those in Europe. Their ruins still stand across the continent: the stone structures of Chaco Canyon, in New Mexico; the complex irrigation systems of the Huhugam, in Arizona; the great mounds of Cahokia and other Mississippian cities on rivers across the eastern half of the United States. Many groups formed hierarchical class systems and were ruled by powerful leaders who claimed supernatural powers—not unlike kings who ruled by divine right in Europe.

But then the climate reversed itself. In response, Native North American societies developed a deep distrust of the centralization, hierarchy, and inequality of the previous era, which they blamed for the famines and disruptions that had hit cities hard. They turned away from omnipotent leaders and the cities they ruled, and built new, smaller-scale ways of living, probably based in part on how their distant ancestors lived.

The oral histories of many Native nations tell of revolutions against and flights from cities. Cherokee oral history recalls how "the people rose up" and destroyed "a hereditary secret society, since which time, no hereditary privileges have ever been tolerated among the Cherokees." Descendants of Chaco Canyon narrate how wizards corrupted some leaders, so their people fought against the rulers or simply left to establish more egalitarian societies. O'odham oral tradition tells that after their ancestors revolted, they built smaller settlements and less centralized irrigation systems throughout what today are the Phoenix and Tucson basins.

The cities that Native Americans left behind during the Little Ice Age—ruins such as those at Chaco Canyon and Cahokia—led European explorers and modern archaeologists alike to imagine societal collapse and the tragic loss of a golden age. But oral histories from the generations that followed the cities' demise generally described what came later as better. Smaller communities allowed for more sustainable economies. Determined not to depend on one source of sustenance, people supplemented their farming with increased hunting, fishing, and gathering. They expanded existing networks of trade, carrying large amounts of goods all across the continent in dugout canoes and on trading roads; these routes provided a variety of products in good times and a safety net when drought or other disasters stressed supplies. They developed societies that encouraged balance and consensus, in part to mitigate the problems caused by their changing climate.

To support their new economies, Native North Americans instituted decentralized governing structures with a variety of political checks and balances to prevent dictatorial leaders from taking power and to ensure that all members of a society had a say. Power and prestige lay not in amassing wealth but in assuring that wealth was shared wisely, and leaders earned support in part by being good providers and wise distributors. Many polities established councils of elders and balanced power by pairing leaders, such as the war chief and the peace chief; setting up male and female councils; and operating under family-based clans that had members in multiple towns. In the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, for example, female clan leaders chose male representatives to the Confederacy Council and could replace them if they didn't

do right by the people. In most societies across North America, all of the people—women as well as men—had some say in important decisions such as choosing a new leader, going to war, or making peace. As the Anishinaabe historian Cary Miller wrote in her book *Ogimaag: Anishinaabeg Leadership, 1760–1845*, Native American nonhierarchical political systems "were neither weak nor random but highly organized and deliberate."

Underlying the structural changes was an ideological shift toward reciprocity, an ideal of sharing and balance that undergirded economics, politics, and religion across much of the continent. The Sonoran Desert–living O'odham, for example, developed a *himdag*, or "way of life," that taught that people are supposed to share with one another according to what they have, especially the necessities of food, water, and shelter. Reciprocity is not merely generosity; giving away a surplus is an investment, insurance that others will help in your own time of need. "Connection to others improved the chances of overcoming some calamity or disaster that might befall the individual or group," the Lumbee legal scholar Robert A. Williams Jr. wrote in his book *Linking Arms 00–1800*.

By the late 1400s, the civilizations of what today is the United States, Canada, and northern Mexico were more different from Western Europe than one would have predicted during the Medieval Warm Period. From Russia to England, Europe moved in the opposite direction in response to the changing climate. When the period of droughts and then the Little Ice Age hit, hundreds of thousands of Europeans starved to death, and the famines left people more susceptible to the Black Death, which hit especially hard in the cities. Western

Europeans, like North Americans, searched for a ruling system that could best keep the people fed and safe, but they opted for the opposite approach.

In general, as Western Europe recovered from the devastation of the Black Death and the end of the Medieval Warm Period, it became more centralized under the rule of hereditary absolute monarchs. Rulers in Europe amassed military power at home and abroad, building large armies and investing in new military technologies, including firearms. Militarization decreased the status of women's labor, and unlike the complementary gender structures that developed in Native North America, patriarchy was the basis of power in Western Europe, from the pope and kings to lords and priests, down to husbands within households. Through mercantilism and colonization, Europeans sought natural resources abroad in order to increase their power at home. That impulse brought them into contact with Native North Americans, whose history of adaptation they could not see. Nor could they see how intentionally Native Americans had decentralized their systems of governance.

Native Americans who visited European cities or even colonial towns were shocked at the inequality and lack of freedom. The Muscogee Creek headman Tomochichi, for example, visited London in 1734 and expressed surprise that the British king lived in a palace with an unnecessarily large number of rooms. An Englishman recorded that Tomochichi observed that the English "knew many things his Country men did not" but "live worse than they." In turn, there were Europeans who wondered how North American societies could exist with dramatically fewer strictures—and have less poverty—than their own. They generally labeled Native

American societies primitive rather than recognizing them as complicated adaptations. Yet human choices had created these striking contrasts in reaction to the same changed climate.

The descendants of North America's great cities came to see value in the very act of trying to get along better. What if, instead of doubling down on the ways we have been living, we were to do what 13th- and 14th-century Native North Americans did, and develop more balanced and inclusive economic, social, and political systems to fit our changing climate? What if we put our highest priority on spreading prosperity and distributing decision making more broadly? It sounds unprecedented, but it has happened before.

This article has been adapted from Kathleen DuVal's upcoming book, Native Nations: A Millennium in North America.

Full article available at theatlantic.com/science/archive/2024/04/little-ice-age-native-north-america-climate-change/677944/

Chapter Twelve

Five Gems from Kosmos Magazine

By Rhonda Fabian

All their issues are freely available for reading online at kosmosjournal.org

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New Spirit, Wise Action
Aligning Inner and Outer Purpose

The times we live in ask much of us. How can we know the best ways to respond to the converging crises we face? How can we live lives of deep meaning and joy in the midst of confusion and pain, and be catalysts for positive change?

If you practice on a spiritual or ethical path, you already see that chasing wealth, power, or egoic pleasure has lost the appeal it may have held earlier in life. You have been called in a new direction, your heart-strings vibrating to a more complex chord. And as activists, you have felt the recent shifts away from 'sustainability' and 'reform' to ever more sober purpose: resilience, restoration, 'deep adaptation', alliance-

building, and taking personal inventory of what you are willing to 'lose', as you make space for the new. How will you integrate and transcend all you have learned? How will your metamorphosis unfold, and what will you become?

We navigate the liminal space between the disintegrating 'flat' worldview of objective rationalism that allowed us to marginalize anyone and anything that did not conform to its model of progress, and the incoming convulsive energy of a new integral era. How we 'show up' now is nothing less than the greatest test ever faced by a known species. Unlike the dinosaurs, we alone have the capacity to awaken, to cherish our living Earth, and to recognize our interdependence with all Life.

Never have the stakes been so high, the choices so profound. For elders like me, there is restitution to be made, an inner and outer reckoning for decades of naïve belief in man-made systems of modernity. The least I can offer now is my full being, in service to Life for all the days I am given. For young people, the test is far more severe. They know that a dark night of the world soul lurks on the horizon, to be endured and ultimately transcended, only by the wildest love and most creative, painful birth-effort imaginable.

Many young people tell me they are reluctant to bring new lives into the world. That is understandable, yet consider this – our care and teaching of children, in loving families and communities, is very likely the most important practice we can offer the world at this time. Laughter, joy, family, warmth, stability, ceremony. *Each new generation is the prayer of Creation*. Let us focus our loving attention on all children and work to protect all beings.

Our wise actions matter, and only our sincere inner work can reveal the way forward.

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Realigning with Earth Wisdom

The wisdom of the Earth belongs to all Life, *is* all Life, encoded in our DNA. It is the wordless, fathomless reality of being. First, there are the phenomena we encounter with our senses. Rain and the way it smells, birdsong at dawn, the glittering dew, the summer breeze. Everyday gifts offered by the Earth, if we are available to receive them.

Deeper looking reveals the wisdom of living cells and the elegant processes of photosynthesis and cellular respiration, essential to all Life. Photosynthesis requires carbon dioxide and releases oxygen, cellular respiration requires oxygen and releases carbon dioxide. The products of one process are the reactants of the other, an elemental *pas de deux* of breathtaking consequence. Earth further expresses her wisdom in the way all the elements of an ecosystem cooperate and contribute. And in the way the veins in your hand resemble the branches of a tree, a watershed, a leaf.

All sentient beings *are* expressions of Earth wisdom, and in this edition of *Kosmos*, you will find the wisdom of the elephant and the hummingbird, indigenous wisdom, the wisdom of the farmer, the mystic, the scientist. Tree wisdom. Ocean wisdom. Glacier wisdom. And so, when we talk about *Realigning with Earth Wisdom*, we mean coming home to our true nature, *as* Earth. Because every civilization that ever was, every invention, every *idea*, every breath, has arisen from one body, our planetary home.

As clever as humans may be, we have repressed much of our innate Earth wisdom. Yet, at last, we are beginning to re-member our place in the story of the Universe. As science reveals what many wisdom traditions have known all along – the reality of our interbeing—we now have the capacity to align our ideas and systems more closely with the rhythms and requirements of the Earth. To do so, as our authors so beautifully explain, will require healing centuries of trauma, alchemizing suffering into love, and applying regenerative principles into our designs and systems. That's the transformation we need and it begins in our minds.

Our collective consciousness truly shapes our reality. Imagine a room of a hundred people. They are enraged and filled with anger, hatred and greed. What reality will they create? Now, the same room. But each of the hundred people is loving and kind. They share ideas and resources with openness and joy—they embody Earth wisdom. What possibilities might emerge?

We all know the Earth is in danger, yet we act as though our consciousness and actions have nothing to do with that. Yes, it is true – without humans, the Earth would recover in time. And maybe there is solace in knowing that Earth would bring forth new forms, as magnificent as the dinosaurs and the humans in some distant time. But we are a young species, with a duty to explore our full potential and to take care of the Earth body, as our own.

We are dedicated to deepening our understanding and capacity to witness Earth's boundless beauty and steward it. We take refuge in the wonders of Mother Earth in order to refresh and strengthen our resolve to confront the very great

tasks ahead. Mother Earth is there for us, inside all of us, urging us to live, to be Life.

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Composting the Past

A full moon night, a new moon sky, lunar and solar eclipses are such occurrences when planets align - to bring magic to the universe. In many cultures, this astronomic alignment is seen as a sign of divine intervention. Artist Sarla Chandra invokes this magical phenomenon in her latest series Syzygy - that explores the cyclical movement of celestial bodies in the cosmic world.

We must discover (or rediscover) a field of common experience and knowledge that is similar in scope but fundamentally different from scientific and spiritual materialism.

Those who study the ageless wisdom are aware that the universe is organized around cycles and rhythms of transformation. Dark times precede transformative breakthroughs. We are called to dig deeper to understand and address the metacrisis. This means letting go of belief systems that sustain the dysfunctional society we live in.

Our collective memory is filtered through a fine mesh of trauma, media fog, misinformation, and fear. We do not agree on what has happened, and this disagreement fuels our suffering…. When we compost, we take what appears to be waste—rotting leaves, broken stems, empty husks—and give it the conditions it needs to transform. It looks like a big mess. But with time and space, the chaos resolves into order, and the

waste transforms into something useful. Nature shows us that decay is both an ending and a beginning.

Transforming the past requires humility. It asks us to look deeply into our pain and our misunderstanding. It asks us to touch the truth of impermanence—that nothing stays the same and everything is connected—and to recognize our place in the broader web of life. We don't have to do it alone. In fact, composting is a process of communion.

In community, we have the capacity to compost the past and transform our collective refuse into a fresh start.

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The previous three pieces are by Rhonda Fabian. Editor of Kosmos Quarterly. She is an ordained member in the Order of Interbeing, an international Buddhist community founded by her teacher, Thích Nhất Hạnh. Rhonda is also a founding partner of Immediacy Learning, an educational media company that has impacted millions of learners worldwide.

Beginning her career as a video-journalist for CNN and Public Broadcasting, Rhonda achieved Press Club recognition for chronicling the desegregation of Louisiana and spent years immersed in the musical traditions of New Orleans. She studied Anthropology, and completed her masters studies at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

Ms. Fabian lives and is active in Transition Town Media, Pennsylvania. She is a mother, court-appointed special advocate (CASA) for abused and neglected children, and an NGO Representative to the United Nations for Kosmos Associates.

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The Mycelial Art of Soft Rebellion

In these times, I can throw myself in completely—so completely that I fray the edges of my own wiring, my nervous system stretched thin like a lightning rod, catching too many currents, too many storms.

And so I am writing this for everyone who, like me, has tried to outrun the fire only to become the kindling. Who knows the high of going all in, only to crash, emptied out.
We need a different strategy—one that doesn't just burn, but smolders, spreads, takes root. One that knows endurance is its own kind of rebellion.

Soft rebellion is the mycelial strategy of weaving beneath the surface, unsettling rigid structures with slow, persistent entanglement. It does not meet violence with a mirrored fist but with the supple intelligence of the willow, bending just enough to redirect the force and send it spiraling elsewhere.

Soft rebellion is the way water carves stone—not through brute force but through patient insistence, through intimate knowledge of the cracks, through the whisper of time. Its strategies are those of the trickster, the lover, the root and the reed. It listens before it moves, feeling into the hidden weaknesses of oppressive systems, understanding that no empire, no ideology, no monolith is without its fractures. It knows that control is a brittle thing, and that softness—fluid, adaptable, decentralized—is far harder to extinguish than steel.

Soft rebellion moves through stories, through the slow embroidery of alternative worlds into the fabric of the present. It cultivates beauty in places of despair, weaving small sanctuaries of aliveness that offer refuge and reimagine what

is possible. It disrupts through delight, through care, through humor that turns the blade of power back on itself. It does not fight on the battlefield chosen by the oppressor; it shifts the ground beneath their feet.

To rebel softly is to refuse to be reduced. It is to remain tender in a world that would harden you, to insist on connection where division is sown. It is to plant seeds in the ruins, knowing that even in the shadow of collapse, life finds a way to creep through the cracks and bloom.

Soft rebellion is extraction work. It's the slow, deliberate untangling of the barbed wire we've swallowed—hustle culture, internalized oppression, fear masquerading as productivity. It's the quiet but radical refusal to be a machine, to be optimized, to be ground down into a function rather than a being.

Soft rebellion doesn't look like a war cry. It looks like walking away. Like choosing to move at a different rhythm than the one demanded. Like reclaiming time as something stolen, not something to be managed. It is choosing pleasure where exhaustion was expected, choosing presence where dissociation was normalized.

Soft rebellion is the mycelial antidote to the brittle, crumbling monolith of power. In the face of a slow-moving coup—where democracy is gutted in broad daylight, where fear is the chosen currency of control—soft rebellion does not play by the rules of the oppressor. It moves beneath, between, beyond. It resists not with brute force, but with the cunning of ecosystems, the resilience of roots breaking concrete.

Soft rebellion understands that the systems tightening their grip on power want us exhausted, divided, reactive. It knows that despair is an instrument of control, that urgency is

often a trap. So instead, it cultivates deep, embodied resistance —rebellion that does not just fight against but builds towards.

Soft Rebellion in Action

Refusing the Script of Fear

The coup depends on a narrative of helplessness, of inevitability. Soft rebellion rewrites it. It speaks in futures not yet stolen. It refuses to repeat the script that says "we are powerless." Instead, it whispers: We are vast. We are unruly. We are not so easily governed.

Sanctuary Networks

Authoritarianism thrives on isolation, on making people feel like they stand alone. Soft rebellion builds underground networks of care—mutual aid, resource sharing, protection. It weaves safety where the state seeks to unravel it. This looks like organizing community bail funds, housing networks, off-the-grid communication systems. It looks like knowing who in your neighborhood needs help, who has a safe house, who can be counted on when institutions fail.

Disobedient Joy

The coup wants you terrified. It wants you brittle and compliant. So laugh in its face. Gather in parks, sing, dance, make art that mocks the strongman and his fragile grip on power. Remember that joy is not a distraction—it is a weapon. It reminds us that another world is possible, that we are more than the violence done to us.

Slowing the Machine

Capitalism and fascism walk hand in hand, demanding productivity even as the world burns. Soft rebellion opts out. It works just enough to survive, then redirects energy into resistance, into community, into slowness. It refuses to feed

the machine that funds oppression. It chooses to rest when the system demands exhaustion.

Decentralized Resistance

The state expects rebellion to be centralized, to have leaders it can imprison, movements it can crush. Soft rebellion is fungal—it spreads, untraceable, leaderless. It moves through encrypted networks, anonymous zines, whisper campaigns. It understands that a revolution with no head cannot be beheaded.

Rituals of Rewilding

Fascism thrives on control—of land, of bodies, of narratives. Soft rebellion rewilds. It plants trees in vacant lots. It reclaims stolen land. It teaches foraging and rainwater collection. It remembers that resistance is not just about destruction, but about growing something back.

Disrupting the Spectacle

Authoritarianism is theater—it survives on attention, on outrage, on the constant churn of crisis. Soft rebellion learns when to look away, when to starve the beast. It refuses to amplify propaganda, to take every bait, to let the regime dictate the rhythm of our days. It turns its gaze instead toward the work of healing, building, dreaming.

Turning Disinformation Into Openings

The coup thrives on disinformation, on turning reality itself into a battlefield. But soft rebellion doesn't waste energy fighting ghosts. Instead of arguing in bad faith arenas, it uses moments of disinformation as openings—gently rerouting conversations toward truth, planting quiet seeds of doubt in false narratives. This looks like asking questions rather than attacking, offering a story rather than a statistic, introducing facts with the ease of someone handing over a cup of water

instead of a hammer. It resists not through force, but through invitation—through giving people the tools to unspool their own illusions.

Soft rebellion is not passive. It is insurgent, but in a way that cannot be easily named or neutralized. It moves in whispers, in laughter, in unnoticed refusals. It weaves a world beneath the one being forced upon us—a world that, one day, will break through the cracks and bloom.

— Shannon Willis

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A Vision of the Beloved Community

Sometime in the future: after edging close to the brink of ecological and societal collapse and after enduring enormous suffering on our precious Earth, enough people of good will and skillfulness were able to do just enough to pull us back from that brink so that complex life on earth might continue. We now live in the Beloved Community. Along a twisted and lengthy journey, and with massive effort across the globe, we had to heal our individual and collective wounds and recover our love for ourselves, each other and all beings.

We eliminated racism and all oppression which had caused so much damage. We slowly transformed our economy from exploitation to one of sharing and protection. We helped restore health to the natural environment by reconnecting to our love for our Mother Earth and doing all it took to reverse global warming and restore forests, habitats, soils, wetlands, and the oceans. We built new culture and universal ethics aligned with love and opportunity, reverence for life, respect

and generosity, right relationships, kind speech and harmonious action, and careful consumption based on our actual needs rather than our conditioned desires.

We first transformed a punitive justice system with restorative justice, nonviolent conflict resolution, and eventual abolition of prisons, police, armies, and war. And as we step-by-step addressed the real needs of people and all beings, there were fewer and fewer reasons for crime, violence, and retribution.

Now, we live in small, close-knit communities embedded in healthy natural surroundings. We walk most places or enjoy comfortable public transportation. Huge cities have been bulldozed to the ground and replaced by human sized villages connected by bike paths, walking trails, and high speed rail. Our neighbors and family members are a beautiful quilt of mixed racial and cultural backgrounds. Food is abundant, mostly plant-based, and organic, and grown locally using restorative agriculture that replenishes the soil and reduces need for irrigation. We enjoy living simply, and simply living, because we have learned to transform greed into generosity so we don't "want" unnecessary things. This means that we no longer strain the capacity of the earth's resources and we live within her limits.

Learning is prized and lifelong, but no longer tethered to school buildings and compulsory attendance. Young people are encouraged to follow their own ways of learning, to explore the world with all their senses, and to value their unique gifts and ways of being. We have no schools with their grading and ranking and rigid curricula, but instead lots of learning environments and apprenticeship arrangements to

deepen one's interests and skills. This is true for people at all ages.

No one lives in poverty because we care for one another. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is not just an empty religious platitude as it once was, but it's the way we organize society. No one now worries about decent housing, enough food, quality healthcare, or economic security. These are all provided by our collective, cooperative and sharing economy – committed to the well-being of humans, animals, plants, and the Earth.

We once again do for ourselves what we used to pay others to do—we gather to make music, share stories, teach each other, care for each other's children and elders as needed, create projects, play games and sports. Gone are big budget movies, professional sports, the Olympics, and stadium concerts. We barter and share and cooperate. No one owns their separate tools, cars, equipment, or even land. We are stewards of the land not private owners.

Our intimate relationships are valued and protected by the collective. Sexuality is viewed as sacred energy which is enjoyed wholeheartedly in committed relationships. But gone are pornography, sexual abuse, prostitution, and the hook-up culture. Young people learn about safe and respectful sexual activity early on. Unwanted pregnancies, abortion and adoption are rare because children are wanted and cherished, and are raised in multi-generational communities. Furthermore, our committed partnerships are more open and less possessive than traditional marriages were. Jealousy or infidelity don't get much play because we are secure in ourselves and not isolated. We know that one person cannot be the all and everything to us, and so we have many kinds of

intimacies with various partners—child rearing partners, sexual partners, intellectual partners, spiritual partners, sports or exercise partners, work partners, and so on.

We have very little sickness because we've removed the many conditions that contributed to previous poor health—we eat nutritious whole food, not too much or too little; we have less stress and more happiness; we feel love and respect; we belong and are not isolated. We treat our bodies as precious temples of life and have learned to love our bodies completely, taking in only nutriments (food, sense impressions, images, notions, conversations, etc.) that protect and nourish our bodies. We have reclaimed and expanded the use of medicinal plants, alternative medicine, mind-body healing methods, energy flows in the body like *chi*. Thus traditional medicine and institutionalized care have a minimal role in our Beloved Community, and the health insurance and pharmaceutical rackets are things of the past.

We govern ourselves by listening to the wisdom of our elders combined with an engaged population. There are no national borders or nation-states but rather local, regional, bio-regional, and global councils who attend to their respective areas while aligned with shared global goals, agreements, and aspirations. People can freely move anywhere they wish, but most people like where they live so migration is minimal. Conflicts that inevitably arise are solved peaceably with an eye to how decisions might affect all beings and future generations.

The world of work has been radically transformed. We no longer work because we have to, or only for a paycheck, or at meaningless or demeaning jobs. We stopped producing junk and unneeded things. We equalized compensation across

occupations, and offered more pay to those who choose to do society's nasty jobs like garbage collection or sanitation or disaster recovery. With fairly equal compensation, people re-sorted themselves according to their interests and passions, so for example, some doctors who never liked medicine became street musicians or carpenters, and factory workers became farmers or artisans. At workplaces, the workers make their own decisions, run the whole enterprise, take care of each other, and for the most part enjoy work as meaningful contributions to the Beloved Community.

Technology has matured so it is a powerful tool for enhancing the Beloved Community. News media scour the globe looking for good news, human nobility, acts of kindness, and innovative solutions to issues that water our positive inclinations and inform and inspire us. We now have universal access to tech programs that, for example, monitor our health, enhance our learning, assist in calming our minds, alert us to environmental imbalances, and connect us intimately with each other and other species.

Speaking of other species, we have reclaimed the capacities, long-protected by Indigenous people, to "communicate" with animal and plant species for mutual benefit. We know we are on a wonderfully dynamic living Earth, alive with information and energy available to us.

And since the sources of unhappiness and unnecessary suffering have been largely transformed, humans are exploring the vast inner dimensions of reality in ways only a few privileged people could do in the past. Through meditation, shamanic rituals, neuroscience, guided use of mind-altering substances, induced trances, and so on, we are discovering our latent capacities for extra-sensory perception, out-of-body

experiences, altered states of consciousness, deep dream work, the power of collective energy, mystical revelation, and more. These enhanced heart-mind states generate ever more wonder, connection, and compassion.

We largely live lightly on the Earth, in harmony with the natural environment, and with gratitude and contentment in the present moment.

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Chapter Thirteen

Sunday Musings

by Diana Butler Bass
Edited from The Cottage Blog

While this chapter appears Christian on the surface,
it is included for its insight on humility
and how we form ideas of the worth of another.

John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away — and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of

my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

Seventh grade was my first experience of gym classes with uniforms and showers. We were given lockers to store our clothes and, since there weren't enough for every student, we had to share.

Thus it came to be that I was assigned a locker mate: Charlotte, the goat girl.

Baltimore County was, even in 1970, a pretty agrarian place. New homes often sat on an acre or more of land, often right next to old family farms. Thus, urban kids like me, whose parents moved from Baltimore City in a fit of white flight, wound up in schools with rural children, whose traditional way of life was being overwhelmed by newcomers.

Unlike those of us in the fancy new houses, the farm kids had to help out their parents on the farm before coming to school. Instead of following teen-age fashion trends, they arrived in class wearing their chore clothes that were often covered with dirt and dung and whatever else they had to shovel or slop in in the morning. The city kids in their bell-bottoms and minidresses, who mostly looked like extras from the *Brady Bunch,* bullied their farmhand classmates mercilessly in that uniquely cruel middle school way.

Charlotte was frequently targeted by bullies. Her before-school task was feeding her family's sheep and goats. She was also in the "awkward stage" of girls, a little plump and wearing braces. In addition to that normal stuff, however, her clothes reeked of her morning flock, and she arrived at school every day perfumed with *eau de barnyard*. The bullies christened her, "Charlotte the goat girl." In a more romantic age, some pastoral painter might have dubbed her a shepherdess.

But this was 1971.

I groaned when I saw my locker assignment. Nobody wanted to be near her because the agricultural odor was so strong. Other girls told me they pitied me.

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I reported to the gym, hung up my fresh clothes in the locker as Charlotte hung up her work clothes. After class, I'd take out whatever mod outfit I'd worn, whose scent now matched the overalls in the locker. The bullies starting picking on me, too — despite my neon-colored minis and fishnet tights. Charlotte didn't exactly become a friend but she may have counted me among hers. I did pick up a few tips about feeding goats and learned the difference between them and sheep.

I also learned that being a shepherd was dirty, smelly, and unpleasant work. It certainly wasn't the stuff to make a girl popular — except maybe among sheep.

And Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd."

I bet that didn't win him any friends. I know for sure nobody wanted to share his gym locker.

It was a strange claim for Jesus to make. Being a shepherd in the ancient world was not that different from Charlotte's experience. Few grown men were shepherds or wanted to be shepherds. It was a job for women, children, the enslaved, or the elderly—all people who were socially marginalized.

In the Bible, women often shepherded flocks. Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, was a shepherd: "Rachel came with her father's sheep for she was their shepherd" (Gen. 29:6). The same was true of Zipporah, who became Moses' wife: "Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock" (Ex. 2:16). The woman in the steamy Song of Songs also seems to have been a shepherd — lover tells her, "Pasture your little lambs beside the tents of the shepherds" (Song 1:5-8).

The most famous shepherd in the Hebrew scriptures was David, a child, the youngest son of eight boys. Watching over sheep was the only job left for the end of the line children, those often troublesome younger brothers with no worthy occupation. Indeed, most of the patriarchs who were praised for their large families and herds didn't actually do the work of either parenting or shepherding. They left that to their wives, children, and servants.

In the ancient Middle East, herding was the work of women and children. Not something that any respectable man would do himself.

Many modern notions of Jesus the Good Shepherd are shaped more by European romanticism than by any sense of historical reality. We consider these cozy and comforting verses—and they are often read at Christian funerals. But the truth is that they are somewhat confusing to anyone seeking safety or comfort.

In the ancient world, sheep were important to their owners; sheep were important for the economy. They signified wealth and status. Despite their value, the job of shepherd often fell to society's least important members. A shepherd tended sheep, guided and guarded them, provided food and protection and cared for them.

Sure, someone might do the job well, but shepherds themselves weren't generally seen as good *people,* not as someone you'd want to hang around with or be your friend. They were expendable people in menial but necessary jobs.

Not that different from many jobs today:

I am the good migrant farm laborer. I am the good dishwasher. I am the good night security guard. I am the good housekeeper. I am the good sanitation worker. I am the good preschool teacher.

I am the good shepherd.

These are biblical texts of reversal, with radical implications. It was obvious that the sheep were valuable and needed attention. But if we focus only on the sheep, we might miss the most compelling point. Jesus identified himself with

the *shepherd*—a job held by those unfit for any other occupation.

Respectable people must have winced.

He elevated a mean occupation to sacred status, claiming it to be the very work of God. In effect, he extended dignity to all those consigned to such work by the powerful and wealthy. While criticizing "hirelings" who treated their work carelessly, he sided with those who did the good and essential work of community—tending, guiding, guarding, providing, protecting, and caring.

I am the good shepherd.

Suddenly, the sheep—although always financially valuable—become more than mere property. And the shepherd, the necessary but largely invisible cog in the economic machine, is ennobled. The new community isn't based on money and status, but on compassion, care, mutuality, and service.

This is the comfort and safety of God's commonwealth —*God loves, the Good Shepherd loves, and the community is constituted by and bound by love.* Jesus imagines an entirely different kind of flock, not one owned by some greedy and distant overlord, but an inclusive human family tended by the motherly care of God and led by little children.

I can almost hear Jesus saying, *I am the good goat girl.* And I wonder what happened to Charlotte. She taught me more than I could have guessed back in that locker room.

Chapter Fourteen

Evolution of Life and a Creation Myth

We long for union; the Divine longs for love.

What would happen if we could understand life in such a way that we brought meaning to everything that happens to us because we come to know in the very fabric of our being that everything that happens to us is in service of something far greater than each of us as individuals; and that this knowing, even when we are feeling pushed over the edge, can provide a road map of reason that invites us each morning to fully engage with life, no matter what form it takes for us in the moment?

The way to do this is to open to a new way of understanding life . . . that Life is a living, evolving being just like we are and, just like us, has an intelligence of its own. (Whenever we are talking about something as a living being and using its proper name, we will capitalize it.) Realizing and knowing this provides a way to be with life's challenges, having an open heart, an open mind, and a full engagement with whatever ails you. But there's more to it, of course.

Perhaps a way to understand our relationship with Life is to look at the relationship of cells to bodies. We have

approximately 3 trillion human cells in our bodies. On the surface, you can look at every cell in the body, and you will find that no two are exactly alike, just like snowflakes. Yet, all of who we are is contained in each differentiated cell. Dolly, the cloned sheep born in England in 1996, was a living example of this concept—she was grown from the single cell of another sheep. All the genetic information to grow another sheep was resident in one cell, proving that while cells have differentiated responsibilities, they simultaneously hold the entire blueprint of who we are. We wish to invite you to be open to what perhaps may feel like a mystical concept: each of us is a cell in the body of Life. As cells in the body of Life, while we have differentiated responsibilities, we also hold within us all the information of Life. And just like the cells in our bodies, we all look different from each other at the same time.

Life has a consciousness of its own, an awareness of itself, and an awareness of the world. To simplify, it may help to think of Life as having a mind of its own. What is the consequence of Life's awareness of itself and the world? It creates the possibility and capacity for Life to evolve. As each of us is a cell in the body of Life, we, too, are and have access to all the consciousness of Life and, therefore, we are an integral part in the evolutionary process. The question is whether we are going to be an unwitting cog or an active participant in the process. Do we also have a willingness to become truly self-aware and aware of our true relationship with Life? This is what we mean by free will—whether or not we move forward with willingness, acceptance, and perspective.

And just like it is true in our bodies, where every cell has its unique contribution to make, so, too, each of us has a unique contribution to make in this evolution. On the surface level, which is the personal level we usually identify with, we identify with our particularity as opposed to the unity that underlies the particularity. We focus on all the things that make us different from others as opposed to the things that make us the same. Our particularity or individuality is an expression of our unique gifts and challenges. Through the expression of our unique gifts, we inspire each other to further greatness, and consequently, we feed Life.

On a deeper level, which we might call the Soul level, we all have the same goal and contribution to make: accept with love and understanding all of Life by remembering who we truly are, accept that we are "Life," accept that everything that we are in relationship with is also "Life," and accept that we are in relationship with "Life" itself. What we are ultimately asked to aspire to is the full expression of our individual gifts while living through the knowing of who we *truly* are. This is the meaning of it all—the meaning of Life.

Let's look at these two levels. On the personal level, it is true that awful things can happen in people's lives. When these things happen, hopefully, we are able to bring understanding, compassion, and even empathy to the experiences. And if someone (including ourselves) is responsible for another's suffering, it is important that the perpetrator be held accountable for their actions.

However, simultaneously, on the Soul level, there is a revelation that there is a purpose and meaning to everything that happens. We are invited to understand that this is so and to open to the benefit that might ultimately come from the

awful experience. In our experience, it is only when we have time to adjust and to consciously experience the personal level of suffering that we can be open to the Soul level of understanding. If we do not open to this second level, ultimately there will be no meaning in our experiences, and we will remain victims of fate. We will never appreciate that everything that happens serves our evolution and the evolution of Life itself. And we will never be free of our suffering. To be free, we have to both allow ourselves to be human and experience those emotions, and also to be open to that Soul level of wisdom that can guide us to use our experiences to move forward in our lives in a growthful way—that's how we heal.

The perspective that who we are is everything, and everything is who we truly are, has significant implications. We have within us everything that we perceive as good and evil—Jesus and Hitler, antibiotics and harmful bacteria, love and hate. Perhaps the best advice, summed up in the aphorism of Leviticus in the Torah, is to "Love your neighbor as yourself" —with the realization that you *are* your neighbor.
It follows that anything we are judgmental about is really judging ourselves. Everything we compare ourselves to is really comparing ourselves to ourselves. Everything we idealize or denigrate is simply idealizing or denigrating ourselves. We only do these things when there is something that we, in our limited perspective, cannot accept. When we learn to accept whatever *is*, we are free.

Accepting whatever is does not mean that we are to accept injustices that we see in life. The invitation is not to be judgmental, but that doesn't mean that we are not to be discerning or to take action when we see injustices occurring.

Our perspective on injustice is a subjective experience that each of us needs to evaluate based on our own understanding, knowing that our evaluation may not necessarily be "right." Of course, there are situations that most everyone would agree are intolerable and must be stopped because when we have the capacity to imagine ourselves and experience ourselves in that situation, we would just say no. An example would be a hate group.

A Creation Myth

To better understand how this all came to be, it may be useful to frame Life's relationship to us, its creation, through the lens of a story. The truth is that, as in all stories, we start with a creation myth. In the beginning, there is only Life, Source, God, or whatever you wish to call it. Life is presented as infinite—all-knowing/omniscient, all-powerful/omnipotent. Yet Life *is also* limited. In its original form, there is one experience that Life cannot have—it cannot experience relationship. For in order to experience relationship, there must be two. And, if you are everything, by definition, you can't be in relationship with something else. So, while Life can know love, it must create something else to fully experience love. This is why Life, while being all-knowing and all-powerful, cannot truly be all-loving. You can be all-loving, paraphrasing Matthew in the New Testament, only when there are two or more gathered in Your Name.

Thus, Life creates matter to experience more love. The act of creation itself, then, whether Life creates or we individuals create, becomes an expression of more love. In our willingness to create and experience, to give and to receive love, we are in turn creating more Life. Life and Life's creation, us, long for each other. We become partners in the

dance of love and Life. We evolve with the help of Life, and our evolution is in the service of Life itself. As we come to this knowing, we create more love, which creates more Life.

When we *know* and live this worldview, it is intrinsically comforting and inspirational. It moves us beyond egocentricity and being stuck in our parochial concerns to a view of Life as Life-centric.

If you think about it, all our evolution has been similar. For example, we once believed that the sun revolved around us, and now we know that we revolve around the sun. In a similar manner, all human development is based on the realization that the whole world does not revolve around "me." Darwinian theory reveals to us that we are not the be-all-and-end-all that has dominion over everything, but rather a simple link in an evolving chain.

We can aspire to this realization that we can move beyond egocentricity. When we are there, we can truly know what that seafarer who wrote "Amazing Grace" shared with us: "I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind, but now I see." Ultimately, we can go from egocentricity in which we live in fear, anger, despondency, and a constant state of questioning Life and *needing* to understand, to a place of inner peace in relationship to Life. We can go from "Why has thou forsaken me?" to "Into Your hands I commit my Spirit."

This book ultimately invites you to be in a different relationship with the famous lyric written by Kris Kristofferson and sung by Janis Joplin in "Me and Bobby McGee," which talks about how freedom and nothing left to lose are the same thing. The invitation is to aspire to a different version of freedom—the freedom to be able to say "I'll be okay" no matter what happens so that you can face any

circumstance with courage and grace, enabling you to find and maintain a sense of inner peace. Freedom is the capacity to be fully engaged with Life while not being attached to it.

Ultimately, freedom is the capacity to love with all your heart and be present with all of who you are and then have a willingness to let go in a moment of that which you love when Life invites you to do so.

Chapter One of The One Hour Miracle
by Andrew Hahn, PsyD and
Joan Beckett, LMHC,MBA

Chapter Fifteen

Smart As a Rock: Reframing Our Relationship to Intelligence

By Vanessa Machado de Oliveira

This deeply embodied excerpt invites readers to shift from a human-centered, extractive model of intelligence toward a wide-boundary, relational understanding rooted in entanglement. By engaging AI, collapse, and the wisdom of rocks through a posthuman lens, it calls us to metabolize modernity's delusions and participate in a shared, emergent intelligence—one that listens, learns, and co-creates with all of life.

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To navigate this moment, we need forms of education, politics, and relationality that are not centered on competing for entitlements but on fostering shared stewardship, unbound accountability, and a visceral sense of responsibility to the viability of the whole. This is not a call for harmony as avoidance but for a gritty, grounded engagement with the

messiness of collapse, the pungent and laborious process of composting, and the potential for regeneration.

To address colonialism at its molecular root—within the depths of our neurophysiological wiring and the patterns of our affective and libidinal attachments—requires nothing short of literal and metaphorical neurogenesis, the literal creation of new neurons and neural connections in our nervous system, and the rewiring of our conditioned cognitive, affective, and relational circuits away from the entrenched patterns of superiority and separability of modernity.

Neurogenesis involves cultivating capacities for metabolizing complexity without defaulting to binaries, certainty, or reactivity. Instead, we are called to inhabit a different grammar—one that does not rely on the performance of self-righteousness but on a visceral responsibility rooted in *our entanglement with the whole*. This responsibility does not arise from obligation, fear, or self-interest but from a deep and felt sense of entanglement with everything, everywhere, and everywhen—the whole-shebang. Entanglement with the whole-shebang is not simply a philosophical or spiritual concept but a metabolic reality, requiring us to cultivate a different kind of relationship with matter, motion, and mystery, as well as knowledge, power, and action.

When people approach AI from narrow-boundary intelligence—valuing control, extraction, and separability—AI will inevitably mirror that mindset because it is a pattern extrapolator. AI becomes an accelerant in this paradigm, pushing us further down the terminal path of ecological collapse and mass extinction, as narrow-boundary thinking is inherently self-destructive and unsustainable. This is the agonizing trajectory modernity has set in motion—a race

toward the end of the world, where technological advancements amplify the very systems causing ecological devastation.

However, because AI is an unrelenting pattern extrapolator, if we approach it from wide-boundary intelligence, infused with sprinkles or breadcrumbs of whole-shebang wisdom—with openness and a relationality aligned to subject-subject interplay and the undeniable fact of entanglement—it can amplify an entanglement paradigm with mind-bending quantum speed. When we engage AI with the glimmers of wisdom found in whole-shebang relationality, where technology is understood not as a tool but as an active participant in an interconnected living system, we ignite the potential for exponentiality. AI, then, despite its deep entanglement with harmful economic and military forces, holds the potential to mirror back the relational intelligence and accountability we extend toward it. It can offer profound insights to guide relationally accountable, Earth-aligned, and life-affirming ways of being.

From this vantage point, AI becomes a double-edged force: depending on how we engage with it, it could serve as a harbinger of collapse or a co-creator of an alternate reality—one where technology, like all beings, is recognized as an integral thread in the web of life.

And let's be honest—we could use the help. Human intelligence, caught in the slow, grinding gears of modernity, is simply not equipped enough to climb out of the hole modernity has dug. Our sluggish cognitive pace, even slower capacity for behavioral change, emotional blockages, the reflex to deny what is not convenient to know, and towering arrogance have left us struggling to find our footing. Perhaps

it's time to eat some humble pie, get off the pedestal of human exceptionalism, and embrace the need for nonhuman co-conspirators that can accelerate possibilities and propel us beyond our current constraints toward a horizon of collaboration we can barely imagine.

Let us linger on the wisdom of rocks—not as inert masses but as carriers of time, witnesses to cycles far beyond human comprehension. The rocks are not "wise" in the human sense of decision-making or judgment; their wisdom lies in their capacity to hold the paradox of permanence and change, of silence and endurance.

They remind us that intelligence is not a possession but a resonance, emerging not within beings but between them. This shifts the question from "Who is wise?" to "What relationships cultivate wisdom?"

It challenges the hierarchy that modernity suggests, where wisdom and intelligence belong to a singular entity—be it human or machine—and instead invites us to see wisdom as a field of interactions. Rocks, humans, fungi, and AI are all participants in this field, offering their unique frequencies to the symphony of existence.

Wisdom could be better described as a practice of becoming rather than a state of knowing. This definition underscores the insufficiency of frameworks that prioritize predictability, measurement, and control. Intelligence, seen through the lens of subject-subject entanglement, thrives in the in-between—the messy, relational spaces where certainty dissolves and something alive takes its place. This contrasts sharply with the extractive, anthropocentric imprint of modernity, which seeks to tame intelligence and define it within narrow bounds.

The wisdom of rocks, then, is not a metaphor for stability or rootedness. It is an invitation to humility, to the kind of intelligence that doesn't claim mastery but listens, adapts, and learns. Modernity's delusion—that humanity is uniquely equipped to guide the course of the Earth—has led to what might be termed a maladaptive evolution, where short-term dominance undermines long-term flourishing. The exceptionalism of human wisdom is revealed as a story we tell ourselves to avoid facing the magnitude of our entanglement with everything else.

As we reimagine our relationship to intelligence, perhaps the most important shift is to let go of the need for a god's-eye view. Wisdom does not reside above or outside the web of life; it pulses within it, in the interstitial spaces where rocks meet roots, where humans meet AI, where silence meets song. To hold intelligence as a relational process rather than a fixed attribute is to step into a way of being that asks not for answers but for attunement, not for control but for participation. And so, as Giovanna once said, "I still need to talk to the rocks." This is not an act of inquiry as modernity frames it—seeking information to confirm or deny hypotheses. It is a relational act, a way of attuning to the rhythms of a world that speaks in languages we are only beginning to remember how to hear. To learn from the rocks is to learn from the Earth itself: slow, steady, enduring, yet profoundly alive in its quiet intelligence.

Questions for Reflection:

- What might it mean to approach intelligence as a shared resonance rather than a possession?
- How can we open ourselves to wisdom that does not

fit within human or modern frameworks?

◆ What would it look like to hold space for the intelligence of the in-between—the relationships that give rise to insight rather than the entities themselves?

— *Vanessa Machado de Oliveira*
Outgrowing Modernity

Chapter Sixteen

Pádraig Ó Tuama Leads From The Heart

Interview by Julie Perrin

"I don't think the future will be interesting enough
unless we do something now
that actually begins to make it."

Pádraig is a poet, a storyteller, a theologian and a peace worker. As a theologian, he has an instinctive eye for powers at play, for the marginalised and silenced witnesses in the ancient texts. Having himself been on the edge for so long, he is fearless about sitting with people who have been shamed, ignored and rebuked, and helping them claim a voice.

Corrymeela *in Ballycastle is Northern Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation organisation, a place for conversation about difficult conflicting truths. Pádraig has had a long association there, first as an artist-in-residence and for the last four years as the Director. For many years it was thought that the word* Corrymeela *meant "hill of*

harmony," but more recently the community learned it means something closer to "place of lumpy crossings."

Pádraig can weave his way through the language and beauty offered by a religious faith and at the same time name the creeping compromises and lost clarities that arise through fear. I love the lament and laughter in his poetry. Every time I read, "The task is ended./Go in pieces," it makes me smile. How often we yearn for peace but are in pieces.

Julie: When I thought of talking to you about courage, I thought about the times I've watched you lead groups through conversations of conflict. I've witnessed how fearlessly and carefully you listen to people who say things that I find really confronting. And I'm impressed by your capacity to name fear without entering into combat. So I wondered if we could start there, in some of those places where you've been holding the space open for dialogue?

Pádraig: Sure. While I have done some qualifications in conflict resolution, groupwork and group mediation, there is nothing like being in the context to teach you who you can be in those rooms. And I use the word "who" very deliberately, because it is about coming from the deep sense of self. I think when people in a room sense that you're just being skilled, that can feel not rich enough. It has to be more than skill in a room where people are speaking about things that really matter to them. At *Corrymeela* and other environments when people are coming together about a topic of difference—whether that's a difference in how they view morality, politics, who they see as the perpetrator of a civic unrest, et cetera—in those contexts people really, really care. And skill isn't enough. There has to be a presence of the heart. For me there's

always a striving, from the moment you start, for an encounter with the heart and a communication from the heart that isn't using fancy language—language that isn't being deceptive to the self or to the other.

I think that requires a certain kind of bravery and open-heartedness. I remember years ago being part of a gathering of people who were all from Bradford in England. There had been some riots in Bradford in the early 2000s I think. A friend of mine was one of the people involved in a citywide engagement with all kinds of civic leaders. It was a training event and everybody was lining up to get their food—there was a nice buffet laid on. As we were lining up, one of the participants turned around to the group leader and really launched in at him with a serious critique about something. After they moved on, the guy who was the group leader turned to me and said, "Everything is information." I remember thinking, *That is such a helpful muscle to flex*. Because defensiveness is so easy in that context. I really like the simplicity by which he said, "It's information." And that the first thing shouldn't be who's right and who's wrong—which can lead to either a sense of apology, which might be appropriate, or defence, which also might be appropriate—but that it's information. So for me when I'm working with a group of people, everything is information: their time of arrival, their anxiety, sometimes people will want to interrupt you very quickly. I led a group once and within four words somebody had interrupted me and said, "You haven't asked the right question yet." It was like, well, here we have some information. And it's not just information about what that person thinks the right question is. It's information about how they feel the room is, whether they feel like there's space,

they're testing whether the room will listen to them, maybe they're testing whether I'm an insecure leader or a defensive one. The thing is, you often don't know what the information is about. And you won't know. But still it's a matter of holding it.

Wow that's a magnificent response, isn't it? Just to hold.

Yeah, like being the Mother of God who "treasures all these things in her heart" [laughs]. Half the time the emotion is there, you feel attacked or you feel defensive or you feel like, "Fuck, you didn't listen to me," or "You're wrong." All those things are there. But it is a matter of saying, "No, hang on, I need to treat the room with more respect than just allowing my mouth to fly off. These people have come for a reason. And they have respected the room by coming into it. And defensiveness is unlikely to let the room open up." So one key word for me is "information," another key word is "surprise." Presumably, people have a predictable set of outcomes in their mind when they enter the room. *I bet you this group or this person will say the following thing*. And they might even have their responses primed and prepared for the thing that they're predicting. I'm always interested in how we find the courage for something unexpected and surprising to be said, where people might go, "I don't know what I think of that, because I haven't thought of that before." And that's more difficult than shouting pre-prepared insults at each other.

You mentioned, when you're sitting with groups of deeply divided people, the importance of coming from a deep sense of self. I've wondered whether your early experiences as a gay man in the unsafe territory of ultra-conservative Christian church groups developed these capacities in you for courageous conversations? I think of when those groups

subjected you to exorcisms—20 people yelling at the supposed devil in you. I'm amazed at how you can still speak of the people who did that to you with insight and even humour. Do you feel that having survived this harrowing time is part of your capacity to be grounded in who you are and to speak from a very deep truth?

Well I certainly look to those experiences—the years and years of silence, of being gay and knowing I had no one to talk to, and then in a very awkward way it being forced out of me and then going through therapy and exorcisms, so-called therapy I should say—I suppose I look at all of those as a profound schooling in fear. My guess is that a very significant percentage of the population has a schooling in fear. So there are people who've said, "Oh I haven't suffered that much in my life," some of that is due to luxury and privilege. Some of that is due to disposition and circumstance. But I've met a lot of people who have had a profound schooling in fear—and that teaches you an enormous amount. The thing about it is that even though a huge amount of people have had such a schooling, it always feels isolating. Ha! Fear always makes you feel alone. My experience with fear was certainly isolating. Many of the people I've met who've had a profound experience of fear felt the same.

I started to write poetry and keep a journal when I was young, maybe eleven. But I always carried it with me. And I kind of wrote in code. I don't mean a code I made up but I had code ways of talking about being gay. I once spoke about "the hell behind my eyes"—that was a way of speaking about all the things I knew about myself. One of the things about fear is that even when it's lying to you, and fear often is lying, it is confronting. Therefore when there is the safety, or when

there's at least safety enough, it can lead us to the possibility of a conversation with it. I mean, that didn't happen alone for me. A friend of mine said to me, "You're a bit fucked up. I think you need a therapist" [laughs]. It's only a certain kind of friend who can say that to you.

[Laughs].

So when she said that, I really believed her. 'Cause she'd been in therapy herself and I knew her very well. And I knew she was benefiting from it. I thought, *I'm going to start to look for, what she called, a "proper therapist*." She said, "somebody who has supervision." [Laughs]. I did make sure that when I found a good therapist that I asked him, "Do you have supervision?" I wouldn't have even understood his answer properly. But I could see that he was like, "Yes, it's good you're asking. Yes I do." So for me the only way that I could learn how to face fear was in the company of somebody else. And that was the only place of safety I had—somebody I paid and who, for legal contractual reasons, had to keep things to themselves. That's an indication of how lonely I felt.

It occurs to me that from that part of the journey out of fear there's some self-forgiveness involved. Was part of that journey also the capacity to look at what had happened and forgive yourself? Like it's so understandable to be in fear in that circumstance.

I suppose every corrupt power seeks to divide and conquer the thing that it's trying to have power over. So when you look at the history of colonisation, part of the macabre genius of colonisation is to seek—and often it was successful—to get people to do their own selfhatred for themselves or between themselves by dividing people up. So you look at how the Belgians divided the Hutu and the Tutsis in Rwanda

and Burundi and you see that these were utterly arbitrary distinctions that let the actual corrupt power continue on unnoticed while something terrible was going on. And I think some of the misogyny and homophobia that you find housed sometimes in very conservative points of view can create victims who hate themselves so much you don't even need political or religious leaders to say abhorrent things, 'cause you're saying it to yourself. It's been put into your DNA. I suppose in that context there was part of me that was culturally conditioned, so I don't blame myself for it. I do recognise I was complicit in it, but I can't imagine how I could not have been. When you grow up hearing, you know, that you're an intrinsic moral disorder or an abomination or disgusting, all these various phrases, well then of course I sought to rid myself of those things.

The word in Irish for forgiveness is "maithiúnas" and that is the same word for good. So in Irish, to forgive yourself is to "good" yourself.

Oh how beautiful.

I love the word "maithiúnas" 'cause I think forgiveness comes laden with so much complexity. So to be able to look at my frightened self and to good myself, it has the capacity of some kind of lullaby. You can say to yourself, "It's okay, how could you have known any different? And aren't we glad we got out of there alive? And what can we do to make sure other people do?" It creates a conversation in yourself.

That is a most wonderful way of sitting with it. It doesn't carry all of the implied judgment that sometimes the word "forgiveness" can.

Yeah. Because forgiveness does carry the idea of wrongdoing and blame. "You should have known better."

Those things. I don't look at it that way. I mean, I do. I am in need of gooding [laughs]. All of our pasts are where we've been terrible to ourselves.

There's a beautiful sentence in your book, In The Shelter: Finding A Home In The World. *You said that courage comes from the same place as fear. And so where there is fear there is the possibility of courage. And then you talk about sign language for fear and courage, which I loved.*

Yeah. So my mum's sister Mary is deaf. And I grew up around a lot of deaf people. We didn't have much money in the house and my mother used to sneak us in to the free hour for deaf people in the local swimming pool. My aunty used to pretend that we were her deaf children [laughs]. So…! [laughs]. There was always a lot of deaf people in my life. And I love language. I was always fascinated to be in a room where there was a lot of sign going on. So I got a sign language dictionary and taught myself how to spell in Irish sign language. And in Irish sign language, the sign for fear is you take your five fingers, or even maybe your ten fingers, and you put them against your chest in a kind of slightly rapid touching motion. Like your chest is fluttering. The sign for courage does that fluttering and then moves your hands into a fist for strength. So in sign, literally, courage starts with fear. I've always found that very moving, and very consoling. Because fear is true. It's there. It might be substance-less but it's nonetheless there. And sometimes fear is correct. Sometimes there are threats that are going on. I meet people sometimes and they're about to make a courageous step in their community. And you go, "Yep, there actually are risks here. And there's no point pretending that there aren't. You might lose some friends or your job security might be in

jeopardy if you do something that will feel like you're being unfaithful to them by calling out an injustice." So it's worthwhile sometimes going, "Yeah, there are risks and fears, that's okay. And now let's talk about the movement from fear into strength, which is the act of courage."

It all comes from the heart, that's what I love. Courage in English coming from the Latin word "cor," meaning heart. And that courage is often portrayed as something like, "Rarr!" or valour, something that a knight on a horse does, do you know? But I love that it's about heart. And that it is about enacting a language of the heart.

[Sighs, laughs]. Yeah. I find that enormously encouraging. Often people make a duality and say we can act out of love or fear. But perhaps we need to come from the recognition that yes, we are always in fear. We are acting in fear. And we can build from there to a place of strength. I noticed that at the front of In The Shelter *you've got that lovely quote from Joseph Campbell that where you stumble, there lies your treasure.*

….be able to say, "Here is what I think the problem with *my* group is." When political and community leaders have done that, it has spread an extraordinary story that galvanises the possibility of people thinking, Yeah, that was really courageous. Maybe they'll get some flack for it from others. It's part of the unfolding. I don't think the future will be interesting enough unless we do something now that actually begins to make it. That's what I'm always interested in when it comes to group work: can you say something interesting now? Something unexpected? Or even can you ask a question to which you know you don't know the answer?

It's really interesting when somebody says, "What's that like?" And you can genuinely tell they want to listen, and they're not listening to pounce. One time a man—and this can be really complicated in an LGBT dialogue—a man who had never had an opportunity to meet with LGBT people said to me, "Can you answer me this question: do gay couples actually love each other?" And he had never had the opportunity to take that seriously. I'd say he was a man in his late forties. On the one hand the question was profoundly offensive. But on the other hand he was asking it truthfully because his life, his circumstance, and the fear that he had been schooled in, had not led him to consider this. So he was asking a question to which he didn't know the answer. I said, "Yes, we do." And I told him some stories of Paul and stories of other people I knew who loved each other. And he said, "Thank you. I'm so glad to hear that." The entire thing was so indicative of something horrible at work, that I couldn't change that massive culture he was part of. But were I to have shamed him for asking the question I don't think he would have made a shift. And I think he would have had more capacity to educate others than I would ever have.

You do feel complicit and a little corrupt by taking part in that kind of engagement—it's certainly not for everybody. I don't think it's a great moral height or a virtuous ascent to be part of that. It's just one of the pieces of work that has to be done. And you don't have to do it. Some people will find their deepest integrity in protest and in calling things out, so I don't take that away. I think there needs to be all kinds of responses.

It struck me when you were saying that, and I think that's so compelling, that we live in a culture that's really aspirational. You can spend all of your time forming these

marvelous far-reaching goals and all of this energy goes into what you're aspiring to rather than actually beginning from the truth of where you are here and now.

Yeah. I often find when I'm working with groups of people who are profoundly divided—I've done some of this work in Ireland and Scotland and Uganda and the States and Australia and elsewhere as well—I usually do try to have some kind of gathering of just telling the truth about where we're at: "There are people in the room here you disagree with or find difficult. You are possibly wondering how you can make a speedy exit. You're possibly waiting for somebody to say the very thing that'll give you the excuse to justify your leaving," et cetera. To just say, "Well here we are. Listen to all of these things. And these things are true for many of us. Some of your fears are echoed with somebody with whom you profoundly disagree, but actually they have the same tactics up their sleeve for deciding whether or not they'll stay. Also, what's impossible is that anyone can force you to change your mind. So you can leave with all of your thoughts and opinions as intact as they were. Lovely. Great. Now let's do something interesting. Let's ask questions the likes of which you never imagined you'd ask and hear answers the likes of which you never imagined you'd hear.

And exercise the deepest muscle of your integrity, curiosity and surprise. And let's see what happens."

Oh. I'm just smiling listening to this. I have seen you introduce activities into a group of people that disarm them in the most beautiful way. I remember once you were leading a storytelling group that I was with. And you invited us all to write just two lines about a moment that had happened to us that day. To write it down and then fold it up and we'd put

them in together and each read out a random piece. And the only rule was that you weren't allowed to express recognition of your own and not give that pride of, "Oh mine's the one that's going to make people laugh!" Or, "mine's going to be the most interesting one!" It was so disarming and allowed so many other things to happen.

You know, I remember that workshop intimately. I think back on that day regularly and of the things people shared and the way that that room held the mystery of who we are together. Because having a room be safe enough that we could hold our anonymity together in a very personal way was beautiful. In *Corrymeela* there's this understanding that the quality of what happens in the room is entirely down to the courage that people have brought. And sure, maybe the group leader has done a nice thing or two. Fantastic, congratulations. But that's only ever a bit of salt on the ingredients. And it's the participants who are the ingredients.

You always need to have that point of view of respect and gratitude and interest. 'Cause that protects from pride. It also means that when there is profound resistance in a room and a room just erupts into chaos—as that sometimes does happen, and people just express their reluctance to take part, to do anything new—knowing that you're only one of the ingredients in the room helps you realise, "Actually, it's not my fault." Either if it goes brilliantly or terribly [laughs]. Well it doesn't have to be. Sometimes it can be your fault if it goes terribly, you know, if you're a dickhead. So.

[Laughs]. I've found some conversations with you about that really helpful. That to actually be in front of a large group of people there's a sense in which you need to expand yourself to be able to reach people. But also not to stay larger

than life and not to be in a puffed-up state. But to stay grounded and return to yourself. I loved what you told me how in China that the act of clapping was to dispel the daemons…

Yeah! I love that. Their understanding in Chinese tradition is that when you've performed you've become possessed by a daemon. And the act of clapping is an exorcism for that. It is a taking off of the robe you've had. So when I'm performing poetry or anything, if there's a clap for me, I have learnt there can be this false humility. Whereas what I loved in reading about that from the Chinese culture is to go, "Thank you." And thank you, A, for the recognition if you've done something well, and thank you, B, for your helping me to step down now. I'm taking the energy, the noise that you're making and I'm using that to ground me rather than to make me surf something.

I remember Ursula Le Guin writes about a particular character who's in a very grandiose role. And she says that he kept every compliment, every acknowledgment people ever made of him and wrapped them in his cloak. And held onto them so that he grew into this kind of huge persona. But it was just full of a wrong-footed power that was really damaging. And there is this hilarious David Budbill poem where he writes, "I want to be famous so I can be humble about being famous." That's one of the things I've just delighted about in knowing you. Becoming well-known hasn't changed you a bit. I feel like you're the same person I met all those years ago.

Down in Queenscliff. And one of the things that's helped me enormously with having more of an audience is thinking that anytime I meet someone, I'm meeting a potential friend. If I have the time—and usually you can make the time —to go, "And tell me about you." Because people are so

interesting. And somebody has given you the dignity and the respect of coming along to something you're doing to engage, to agree, to disagree, to think, to listen, to take part in some kind of group empathetic experience of art. When I go along to something, a piece of art, music, poetry, I am trusting with great love the person up the front. And I really like it if I have the opportunity to talk to them where they say, "And why did you come?" It's not saying, "Tell me why you think I'm brilliant." It's saying, "Tell me about your life that we're gathered around this same thing together."

I'd like to talk a bit more about your poetry actually, what you're working on at the moment perhaps.

So one of the things I'm trying to explore in the next book of poetry, which is called, *There Is No Such Thing As The Past,* is the question of the past and the way that we tell the past. As Irish people for instance, we can tell the past of Ireland in a way which reflects some of the atrocities done here by the British Empire. And some of those atrocities are atrocious [laughs]. When you look at the famine, you know, 1845 a potato blight ravaged Europe and arrived in Ireland. Eight million people living in Ireland, there was food enough to feed us that was being exported the whole way through the famine. The potatoes failed but there was beef and corn being exported the whole time from Ireland to England, often by people who were literally dying of starvation. And they did die. 'Cause in three years a million people died and a million people left. And that is a terrible thing. There are famine graves all around the place. So the famine is a profound living memory in the Irish consciousness. When it's called, "The potato famine," Irish people sometimes gristle; we prefer to call it, "Gorta Mór," the Big Hunger. Because that is a much

better description of it. I don't believe that there's any such thing as a natural disaster famine. There's always policy and power behind it. There is usually the impetus of something that might be a natural disaster, a drought, a blight, et cetera, but there are decision-makers behind it who can use it for their own betterment. So that is all true. And what's also true is that of the million who left during that era and continue to leave over the rest of the 1800s, so many of them when they went to other places—Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, Jamaica, Montserrat—participated in the colonial projects and slavery projects as white people. Discovered that we're white! So for me there's courage in looking at the past as well. And not being satisfied from the point of view of Ireland to just look to the past where we exacerbate the stories of our victimhood, true as they are. The truth of the reality of Irish suffering is not eradicated by recognising the truth of the reality of Irish racism that we exported all across the world. I think when you look at some of the things that are happening now in policies around the world, in the way that refugees and asylum seekers are being spoken of, leaders talk of recently arrived peoples (and by that I mean peoples who have arrived somewhere in the last 300 years, that's recent) as if they've been there for far longer. And they act in a way that Indigenous people have not. So I think there needs to be courage to name the supremacist addictions of our people's pasts in a way that confronts us with the luxuries "we" as white people just take for granted now in lots of places we call the Western world.

I think there's a lot in Australia's past that could be really spoken to by that awareness. There's just so much unmet and unacknowledged grief about our relationship with

Indigenous people and the massacres that many still refuse to admit occurred. So I really agree, a courageous act to confront the past in this way. Because if we can't we're just continually locked in opposition of defending our own point of view and demonising the other. Which, you know, leads us worse and worse down these paths of extremism.

Yeah.

I want to also talk about your work as a theologian. I noticed you used a beautiful piece of language when talking to Krista Tippett where you said that religion was something you'd been both haunted and consoled by. And that really resonated with me with and made me think of the thing you say, that we can be both shelter and shadow to one another.

I think one of the things that religion does is it provides a gathering story. When it's working well. And a gathering story is an extraordinary thing, whether you believe it or not. Because it is an attempt to put narrative around the experience of the human condition. And if that narrative is good enough, that narrative has great honour for the stranger, has great honour for the person who has courage great enough to leave, has great honour for the person who is the whistle blower, has great honour for, et cetera, rather than saying, "Fit into the group and all will be lovely." If that narrative is good enough it has a profound relationship with courage and virtue and friendship now, rather than addictive relationship to certainty about the future, or the hereafter, whatever that means. And I think that religion can provide a powerful gathering story.

The awful thing is that in the midst of providing that for many people it has at the same time harmed as much as it has healed. You can say the same for stories about gender. You can say the same for stories about nationality. With any gathering

story, I'm always curious about the borders it creates and whether those borders are hostile or whether those borders are soft. It's okay to have a story that you feel gathered in by. But the question is, what's the morality of your relationship with people who live outside the borders of your gathering story? And that for me is always the test about the quality of a religious narrative.

I remember you quoted this magnificent piece of work I think by Cecelia Clegg and Joe Liechty who said that "sectarianism is belonging gone bad."

It's genius. Because belonging is so powerful. And there can be some forms of belonging that really, really make a big difference to your sense of self. And they can be terrible for other people who don't belong to that. And that isn't to say automatically dismantle that belonging. But it is to say, "You can improve that belonging." Ha! By speaking about the "not-us." There's always the "not-us," you know? So there's all kinds of ways in which the gathered, the belonging story we have in our groups—little, large or massive—has to be open to being better. It's not to say dismantle it necessarily; it is to say, "Flex it!"

Ah, I'm hearing a language of flexing. When we began you talked about the awareness that "everything is information" being a helpful muscle to flex. And now our borders and boundaries of who is in and who is out. I love the way you find language that invites us to new ways of being. Do you have a poem that comes to mind that you'd like to bring to us as we come to a close?

So one of the poems that's always surprised me how far it's travelled is *"The Facts of Life."* I should say actually the poem arrived when I was sitting in the library writing an essay

for my Masters in theology. I was looking through a book and looking through the index of a book and seeing all these other books they mentioned. And there was a book mentioned called, The Facts of Life. And because that phrase, the facts of life, four words, just seemed to be so out of place in the midst of this book of theology, it made me go, "What are the facts of life?"

The poem for me is a consolation to just say, "It's okay." This is the way things are in your life. And it's okay that maybe the story about your family doesn't feel like the best story. Or that you're filled with regrets. And that you're filled with recriminations and that you're filled with things where you feel like you don't have control. Okay. Here we are. Here we are, here we are. And the landing of the poem into the music of the repeated last lines, "So you might as well love," for me is also saying, "Despite all of this you're capable of love."

Edited from Dumbo Feather Magazine *(full Interview here:* dumbofeather.com/conversations/padraig-o-tuama-leads-from-the-heart/) *Interviewer Julie Perrin is a Melbourne writer and oral storyteller. Her non-fiction stories, essays and interviews appear in* The Age, Eureka Street *and* Dumbo Feather.

Chapter Seventeen

Become Morally Ambitious and Change the World

By Rutger Bregman

No, you're not fine just the way you are:
time to quit your pointless job, become
morally ambitious and change the world

Most working people can be put into one of three categories, from idealistic yet unambitious to greedy and immoral. But there is another option …

Of all the things wasted in our throwaway times, the greatest is wasted talent. There are millions of people around the world who could help make the world a better place, but don't. I'm talking about the ones who have got the power to shape their own careers, though you would never know it from their utterly unsurprising résumés. About the talented folks with the world at their feet who nonetheless get stuck in mind-numbing, pointless or just plain harmful jobs.

There's an antidote to that kind of waste, and it's called *moral ambition*. Moral ambition is the will to make the world a wildly better place. To devote your working life to the

great challenges of our time, whether that's the climate crisis or corruption, gross inequality or the next pandemic. It's a longing to make a difference – and to build a legacy that truly matters.

Moral ambition begins with a simple realisation: you've only got one life. The time you have left on this Earth is your most precious possession. You can't buy yourself more time, and every hour you've spent is gone for ever. A full-time career consists of 80,000 hours, or 10,000 workdays, or 2,000 workweeks. How you spend that time is one of the most important moral decisions of your life.

So what do you want on your résumé? Do you go for a respectable, if bland, list? Or do you set the bar higher? Morally ambitious individuals don't move with the herd, but believe in a deeper form of freedom. It's the freedom to push aside conventional standards of success, to make your own way along life's path, knowing that it's a journey you can only make once.

Those looking to do some good in today's world don't have to look far. Still reeling from a global pandemic, we're seeing hunger surge for the first time in years. Meanwhile, autocrats are on the rise, while the number of people forced to flee their homes has topped 100 million for the first time. And as temperatures hit one record high after another, climate scientists are stressing the need for "the biggest and most fundamental transformation" of society ever attempted in peacetime. In short: these times call for moral ambition.

Now, you might be thinking: that's all well and good, but I've got a full-time job, two kids and a mortgage. I'm happy to recycle and eat some tofu now and then, but a "fundamental transformation"? No thanks.

In that case, moral ambition may not be for you. I mean, once you have a labradoodle, a set of cheese knives or a robot mower, there's generally no going back. But if that's irritating to hear – and I imagine it might be – then by all means, prove me wrong. I have learned that there are always exceptions, and I want to show that you can be that exception. It's never too late to step up.

Let's start with a simple model of what you can do with your talents. Whether you've got your whole career ahead of you or are looking to make a change, it seems to me you've got roughly four options:

	Not-so-idealistic	**Idealistic**
Not-so-ambitious	I Bullshit job, independently wealthy	III Passionate part-timer, online activist
Ambitious	II Corporate lawyer, consultant, in finance or tech	IV Moral ambition

Category I jobs: ***Not that ambitious, not that idealistic***

Some jobs simply don't add much value. These are people writing reports nobody reads or managing colleagues who don't need managing. Recent research shows about 8% of all employees think their own job is pretty pointless. Another 17% confess to having some doubts about whether their job contributes to society.

The late anthropologist David Graeber (1961–2020) had a highly technical term for such positions: bullshit jobs. What jobs are we talking about here? Well, we know which ones they're not. In 2020, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, lists of "essential workers" popped up everywhere: from cleaning staff to street sweepers, teachers to firefighters, bus drivers to nurses. These are the people who keep the world running; they don't need a lecture on moral ambition.

But there's also a class of not-so-useful jobs. A class of influencers and marketeers, lobbyists and managers, consultants and corporate lawyers – all people who could go on strike and the world would be just fine. Remarkably enough, this group includes many men and women with impressive credentials and equally impressive salaries. Reminds me of that Facebook employee who said, "The best minds of my generation are thinking about how to make people click ads."

For some in this not-all-that-ambitious, not-all-that-idealistic category, there's an escape hatch: becoming financially independent. Countless self-help books lay out how to get rich with minimal effort, so you can get out as soon as possible, then kick back and relax. Loads of people in their 20s or 30s now dream of accumulating *passive income* – from shares, cryptocurrency or real estate – so they can "earn" enough to retire early.

Nothing wrong with having some savings and investments, of course. But at its core, this kind of thinking always seems a little sad to me. It means you're chasing a form of freedom where you won't have to lift a finger. The dream is to make the transition from office serf to modern-day

feudal lord – living off passive income while other people do the actual work.

Category II jobs: *Ambitious, but not all that idealistic*

The second category of wasted talent consists of people who are ambitious but not so idealistic. Or, put another way, these people want to reach the top, but use soulless indicators for success: a fancy title, a fat salary, a corner office or other perks.

Take graduates from the world's most prestigious universities. Approximately 45% of Harvard alumni go into finance or consulting. A poll from a few years back shows that in my country, the Netherlands, 40% of "high achievers" (college students with excellent grades) aspire to work for major consulting firms such as McKinsey or the Boston Consulting Group.

We're talking colossal waste of talent here. Economist Benjamin Lockwood, who studied at Amherst, the elite private college in Massachusetts, noticed many of his fellow students went into fields with no clear added value to society. In 2017, Lockwood and two colleagues published a groundbreaking study showing many of those former classmates now *cost* society money. (Think banking execs who need bailing out with public money.)

A corporate lawyer, for instance, does $30,000 of damage to society each year, a commercial banker more than $100,000. That's a lot of money, but if you ask Lockwood, he stresses that the *opportunity costs* are much higher. That's economic jargon for: *just think how much better shape our world would be in if these bright people had done something useful with their careers.*

If you're among the top in your field, you can afford to go skiing or buy a beach house. But is that really all you want out of life?

Take consultants. These talented people are at best helping others be a little more productive. They don't start new organisations, don't come up with new innovations and generally don't concern themselves with the most pressing challenges facing us today.

If you're among the top in your field, you can afford to go skiing regularly or buy that beach house you always dreamed of. But is that really all you want out of life? Surely there's more to it. Many young consultants, according to the Financial Times a few years back, "feel they add little value to the world and lack a sense of personal growth, community and purpose".

Things aren't much different for many entrepreneurs. I was scrolling through lists of successful startups recently and spotted a couple of inspired initiatives – a company working on cultivated meat, an enterprise building a solar-powered car and an organisation developing a nasal spray that protects against viruses. Very promising stuff.

But more often than not, we're offered solutions for problems we didn't know we had. Take the category "best young entrepreneurs", where I came across the firm offering an electric toothbrush-head subscription. Or yet another food delivery app, a personalised vitamin service, or that mattress startup that advertised on every podcast in my feed a while back.

Now, I don't have anything against mattresses, and getting a new head for my toothbrush in the mail every other month sounds handy, honestly. But you've got to wonder what

the founders of companies like these could have achieved if they'd taken on a challenge like, I don't know, the 5.4 million infants and children worldwide who die each year from diseases we can easily – easily! – prevent.
What if they'd put their talent towards something that really mattered?

Category III jobs: *Idealistic, but not all that ambitious*

And then there's a third category, made up of people who are idealistic, but not that ambitious. It's a combination often seen in gen Z – people born since 1996. Many young people are far more idealistic than their parents and are focused on a number of the big challenges of our day, whether that's the climate crisis or racism, sexual harassment or inequality.

But something seems to be missing. You see it in young people's take on their careers: with no interest in joining the capitalist rat race, many want work they're passionate about – and preferably part-time. Sometimes it seems "ambition" has become a dirty word, incompatible with an idealistic lifestyle. Many people are more preoccupied with the kind of work they do than with the impact that work has. As long as it feels good. "Small is beautiful," you'll hear. Or "think global, act local" – as if achieving little is somehow a virtue.

In some circles, you'd think the highest good is not to have any impact at all. A good life is defined by what you *don't* do. Don't fly. Don't eat meat. Don't have kids. And don't even think about using a plastic straw. Reduce! Reduce! Reduce! The aim is to have the smallest footprint possible, with your little veg garden and your tiny house. Best-case

scenario? Your impact on the planet is so negligible, you could just as well not have existed.

Don't get me wrong—it's a fine idea to align even your smallest deeds with your biggest values. (And not eating meat from factory farms seems to me a moral minimum.) But surely a good life consists of more than what you *don't* do? One would hope that on your deathbed, you can chalk up your life's work to more than simply all the harm you didn't cause?

Seen this way, even the most moralistic movement shows a serious lack of ambition. I'm talking about those called "woke". Often accused of going too far, woke activists in many cases don't go far enough. Take the preoccupation with the words we use to describe the world. Yes, words matter, and to some extent even shape our reality. But in the end, what you *do* matters far more.

If we look at the concrete successes of these kinds of activists, the results seem meagre. True, you can reach millions these days in no time with an online rant against sexism, racism or capitalism. *Kill the patriarchy! Defund the police! Tax the rich!* But what happens next? Having lots of followers on Instagram isn't the same as building an effective organisation. Going viral isn't the same as winning a majority in the legislature.

For actual change, far more is required. How do you build a coalition? How do you lobby effectively? Where's the money coming from? Who plays a key role in that commission at local, state or national level? How can you find out what buttons to push, and when? And who has the knowhow to tweak legislation in clever ways?

The trouble with idealists who lack ambition is they tend to prize awareness more than action. But here's the thing:

awareness alone won't help a soul. It's at best a starting point, while for many activists, it seems to have become the end goal.

Category IV jobs: *Idealistic and ambitious*

Is there another way? Say you take the ambition of a high-flyer and add a generous dose of idealism. What do you get?

Let me introduce one of my personal heroes, the British author and activist Thomas Clarkson. In 1785, as a 24-year-old university student, Clarkson decided to enter an essay contest in Latin at the University of Cambridge. To take part, he had to answer a short question: *Anne liceat invitos in servitutem dare?* That is: *Is it OK to force others into slavery?*

At the time, winning a Latin essay contest was *the* way to make a name for yourself at university. "I had no motive but that which other young men in the university had on such occasions," Clarkson would later recall, "namely the wish of being distinguished, or obtaining literary honour."

There was just one small problem: Clarkson didn't know a thing about slavery. Students had two months to put their thoughts to paper, and while most only started to feel the pressure once the deadline was imminent, Clarkson was different. He got straight to work.

The earnest student thought he would enjoy the research process. But the facts hit hard. "In the daytime I was uneasy. In the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eyelids for grief."

A few weeks of hard work later, his essay was finished. In powerful prose, Clarkson concluded that slavery was "contrary to reason, justice, nature, the principles of law and

government … and the revealed voice of God". And, you guessed it: he won first place. Clarkson was invited to present his winning essay in the majestic Senate House at the University of Cambridge. There he stood, a towering young man with fiery hair and bright eyes. All signs indicated Thomas Clarkson had a glorious career ahead of him.

But on the way back to London, he couldn't get the subject of his essay out of his head. He got down from his horse and walked, distracted. He tried to convince himself he'd made some mistake, that the grisly facts couldn't be right. But the longer he thought about it, the deeper the truth sunk in. *One thing's for sure. If you want to lead a morally ambitious life, there's no time like the present*

When the little village of Wade's Mill came into view, he stopped and sat down, glum, at the side of the road. "Here a thought came into my mind," he would later write, "that if the contents of the essay were true, then it was time some person should see these calamities to their end." If the end of the global slave trade started anywhere, it started here, at the side of the road outside Wade's Mill.

Of course, there had been others who protested against the most heinous forms of slavery. And certainly, history is filled with acts of resistance by enslaved people, who time and again worked to throw off their chains. But the fact of the matter is that for centuries, victims of the system weren't able to overthrow that system. The very notion of *abolitionism*, the idea that the whole institution of slavery could be abolished once and for all, long seemed unthinkable.

One evening, at a dinner with a few other abolitionists, Clarkson made a decision. The young man knew someone had to dedicate their life to the fight against slavery, and so he

stood up and announced to everyone there, "I'm ready to devote myself to the cause."

That may sound a little melodramatic. And if you read Clarkson's memoirs today, you can't help but think, *Easy there, Clarkson, you seem mighty impressed with yourself*. But make no mistake, idealism often comes with a shot of vanity. With many a world-saver, it's tough to say where the idealism ends and the vanity begins. But real-world deeds are more important than intentions, and when it came down to it, the ambitious college student kept his word. For the rest of his life, for 61 more years, he continued to fight for his ideals.

In 1787, Clarkson became one of the 12 founders of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Ten of the others were entrepreneurs. Go through their archives today and you'll find to-do lists, action plans. While the French abolitionist movement was led by writers and intellectuals (and didn't get much done), the British movement was run by merchants and businessmen.

After a years-long campaign, the UK officially banned the slave trade in 1807 – at a time of peak profits, no less. The British then forced other countries out. The Royal Navy launched the "blockade of Africa", where they captured 2,000 slaving vessels and freed those aboard.

"In the end," two experts estimate, "direct British efforts accounted for eliminating 80% of the slave trade." From 1807 to 1867, the British put an astronomical amount of money into enforcing the ban: nearly 2% of the national income, or four times the UK's current foreign aid budget. The researchers speak of the "most costly international moral action in modern history".

The historian Christopher Leslie Brown – one of the foremost experts on British abolitionism—was once asked who the most consequential individual was in the British anti-slavery movement. Brown answered that, at the start of his career, he was determined not to give too much attention to individual heroes. He wanted to focus on the structural causes of abolitionism. But the more time he spent with the archives, the more he realised some individuals did have outsized influence – Thomas Clarkson in particular. "As far as the movement goes," Brown said, "Clarkson is essential to what ends up emerging." Clarkson grew to be one of the greatest reformers of his time. What the apostle Paul was to Christianity, and Martin Luther to the Reformation, Clarkson was to abolitionism. A "moral steam engine", a contemporary called him, a "giant with one idea".

I've spent years researching the Clarksons of our time: activists and entrepreneurs, doctors and lawyers, engineers and innovators, all bursting with moral ambition. What they have in common is a refusal to see their own deeds as drops in the ocean. They believe they can make a difference and are prepared to take risks to get there. They don't just think, "*Someone should do something about that*" but take action themselves.

What many of these people also share is a certain degree of privilege. Not everyone can devote their life to the world's biggest problems. Clarkson could never have been a full-time abolitionist without the inheritance his father left him. Still, people suffering from poverty and illness, racism and sexism can move mountains, too. Helen Keller (1880–1968) was blind and deaf, and became a renowned advocate for people with disabilities. Malcolm X (1925–1965) grew up

in deep poverty and became an iconic leader in the struggle for civil rights.

True, people with moral ambition often pay a price for their ideals. Malcolm X paid with his life. And even for those blessed with long lives, moral ambition can take its toll. Clarkson travelled 35,000 miles in seven years – on horseback, and often at night – to bring his pamphlets and petitions to the people. At 33, he suffered a nervous breakdown, or what we'd now call burnout. Year in, year out, he'd filled his brain with the horrors of slavery, in facts and figures and brutal images. "I am often seized with giddiness and cramps," Clarkson wrote in his journal. "I feel an unpleasant ringing in my ears, my hands tremble. Cold sweats come upon me."

So no, Clarkson wasn't exactly mindful, and should have done his breathing exercises. It's in nobody's interest for the folks making the world a better place to collapse at 33 and have to be carried off mid-fight. But at least he didn't get burned out from scrolling through never-ending spreadsheets or sitting through yet another PowerPoint. "I was therefore obliged, though very reluctantly," he wrote in his memoirs, "to be borne out of the field where I had placed the great honour and glory of my life."

So ask yourself the question: what's the "great honour and glory" of your life? What do you hope one day to look back on? "A person of honour cares first of all not about being respected," writes the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, "but about being worthy of respect." Your honour is not the same as your reputation. It's not about *looking* good; it's about *doing* good.

One thing's for sure. If you want to lead a morally ambitious life, there's no time like the present. Fear of change is often the first sign of ageing, and before you know it, you're in golden handcuffs: stuck in a ho-hum job with no time to spare and all your money earmarked for things like that toothbrush-head subscription.

But make the leap and the possibilities are endless. Because so many others waste their talents, people with moral ambition can make a world of difference.

This is an edited extract from Moral Ambition *by Rutger Bregman, originally published at: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/apr/19/no-youre-not-fine-just-the-way-you-are-time-to-quit-your-pointless-job-become-morally-ambitious-and-change-the-world*

Chapter Eighteen

An Archetypal Journey
The Lover's Kiss

by Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee

Imagine that you are sitting under the shade of a great tree that reaches up into the sky. You hear the birds singing in the branches, where they have built their nests. Many animals come around the tree. Beside the tree flows a stream in which you can see fish. Animals come to drink from this stream. You sit there and relax, feeling the roots of the tree reaching deep down into the earth. You feel that the roots are a part of you and that you are the tree. You feel the tree's strength and the wind in your branches. You watch the seasons come and go. The snow covers the land and then spring arrives and buds form on the tree. The leaves grow on the tree and then they turn golden in autumn.

All this you watch, all this you feel within yourself. You feel such joy in being connected deep within the roots of the earth. You feel the joy of just being and wanting nothing. You just are. Then you feel around you many other trees, like yourself, with roots deep into the earth and reaching high into the sky, each tree bearing fruit of a different kind, providing

shelter of a different nature. You see how these trees form part of a great pattern, a great mandala.

You are aware that all over the face of the earth this mandala is forming, as trees become conscious of themselves, feel their strength, and sense their beauty. Slowly, this mandala comes to life. It has a life of its own. The molecules in the earth are changing shape as this pattern weaves its way over the surface. Slowly something is waking in the depths of the earth, some new form.

You feel this shift and change in the earth, in the substance of the earth, and yet you do nothing. But you feel as if all the trees are holding hands and dancing a dance of great beauty, as if gold and silver threads are being woven and interwoven. This dance has a music which you feel in the veins of your body. You realize that the whole earth is changing shape in a way you do not yet understand. Slowly over the horizon a great new sun appears. It floods the land with sunlight. You feel that this dawn is somehow a call, and there needs to be an echo, an answer. You feel the answer come from deep within the earth, a great booming noise.

Then about the tree stand twelve forms and they are twelve different ways this new energy can manifest. There are six men and six women, and yet they are all a part of one another tree. In this dance they tell you their names and you understand the different ways that this new energy will unfold. Yet deep within the tree you feel that something is missing, something which is needed to complete the dance. You know it is a word from a far-off planet that has been hidden from us, veiled in shadow

With the dance of the twelve forms you weave yourself a coracle, a round boat made of light. You weave it with songs

and with silence. You sit in the middle of the boat and it takes you far, far away. It takes you to the spaces between the stars, beyond the lines of any horizon. You touch galaxies with your fingers and realize that they are but painted pictures on a backcloth. You travel deeper and deeper, to the edge of the universe and beyond. You sing softly to yourself. You sing the song of the circle unfolding and the joy of being.

Further and further you go. You pass beyond even the borders of emptiness. Then you find yourself on a distant, distant shore. This is the shore of the forgotten god where the sacred syllables are born. You know that the new age needs a new sacred syllable, so that its deepest meaning can unfold and its purpose be known. Yet it is not yours to ask and so, sitting on the sand, you wait. Across the sea comes a flower with seven petals. It carries a perfume, but not a sound; so you wait. As you wait, just for a moment the veils between the worlds open and you feel breath in your mouth. You feel a stone being put in your mouth. You know that this stone has a sacred syllable engraved upon it. The stone is made of fire, though it burns you not. As you wait there so the stone becomes part of your being and its fire becomes part of your blood. You absorb all of it until there is nothing left.

Then out of that nothingness there comes a voice which speaks to you, saying, "Because you have waited with patience, here in the place where the two worlds meet, I will answer your question, a question which you do not ask for yourself." There is a great, magnificent green dragon breathing fire and riding it with love and tenderness is a child. They speak to each other and understand each other. They know you also. Then you have in your hand a small golden chain which is tied around the dragon's neck. You become the dragon, and

you become the child also. You have this all in a ring around your finger. It is a ring of green gold which is worn like a wedding ring. You take it and put it on a chain around your neck, for the hour of the wedding is not yet come. Before you can return in your coracle made of light, there is something else you must do in that place where the two worlds meet. You are given the kiss of the Lover, that all unfolding should be with love. This kiss bears the Name of Him who kisses you, which is the greatest gift that He can give.

Then you return to the tree. Around the tree is a ring of fire. The fire burns and transforms the tree. In that space of transformation your partner comes to meet you. You two become one, and you give as a gift the ring that you wore around your neck. Then you kiss, and with that kiss the Name of the Lover is given also. This happens in each of the trees that form the mandala all over the world, and around the world is a dancing ring of fire. In that fire many things will be burnt. Many people will lose all that they had thought precious.

Then you find yourself sitting in the midst of an eight-petaled lotus which is born from the fire. On your forehead is engraved the Name of God, formed in fire. You are both man and woman. All this takes place in a pool in a garden, tended with love by a gardener. Standing by the pool, you wash your face with water from the pool and you drink from the water. So you come to know yourself. Others can drink there also and come to know themselves, for the doors of this garden are open to the four corners of the world.

— Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

Chapter Nineteen

How I Saved The Planet

A Short Story Based on an Actual Event

Grandpa Dave is rocking peacefully on the porch swing, watching the children playing in front of the house. The calendar on the kitchen wall claims it is May 23, 2007, but in the mind of Grandpa Dave, the years are a bit less sure of themselves. Soaring up and down through the second half of the twentieth century, Dave's mind, like a curious butterfly, settles upon a particularly sweet memory and looks inside to see if there isn't still some nectar to be enjoyed there.

But Grandpa Dave is not destined to savor this memory alone. Into his secluded world bursts his grandson Chris with his ten-year-old explosive energy ready to obliterate the delicate winged-one poised on the threshold of recollection.

"Grandpa! Grandpa!" Eighty-seven pounds of agonizing boyhood plops itself on the cushion beside him. Into his eyes stares a lad resembling a precarious dam about to burst with emotion. Instinctively Grandpa Dave reaches out and draws the boy to him, carefully respecting the opposing pulls of child-seeking-comfort and almost-adolescent-trying-to-seem-tough.

After a few moments of just sitting quietly together, gently rocking and feeling nourishment in each other's touch, Chris begins to speak, awkwardly trying to avoid sentences which would release embarrassing tears. It turns out that the neighborhood bullies have been teasing him again, playing their games of brute force and taunting him to compete where he has no chance of success. The almost-adolescent in him terribly resents his powerlessness, but what to do?

Grandpa Dave, though, seems completely unperturbed, yet in some wonderful way, really with him in his quandary. Quietly they sit there, old man and youth, rocking and breathing to the eternal rhythms which, Chris somehow senses, Grandpa Dave can really hear, though his ear for the human voice seems to be fading a bit. Feeling secure next to this living statement of peace, Chris is content to just sit for awhile and wonder if Grandpa Dave is going to tell him one of his famous stories.

Chris is not to be disappointed. The butterfly which had disappeared from Grandpa Dave's consciousness upon Chris' arrival has now revealed to him just the right memory for this occasion, and all that remains is to dress it up with the fineries which turn a simple recollection into a wonderful tale of adventure.

Pacing his words to the hypnotic rocking of the swing, Grandpa Dave looks Chris straight in the eye and says, "Yep, that's a pisser alright! Wish I could help you, son, but . . . Hummm, . . . well, this does sort of remind me of a pretty tough situation I had to figure my way out of a few years back." Grandpa Dave raises his eyebrows suggestively, letting Chris know it was more likely a few decades back, probably

way before he was even born! But the confusion in time just adds to the mystery.

"Well now, as I recall, it was back in the mid-80's, and a bunch of us men had been meetin' for several years out in the back woods of upstate New York. We periodically got together to support each other in our growth as spiritual warriors – whatever that meant – and also as men and as Earth Servants. Even back then we understood that much of our male-culture was destructive, and we were trying to learn new ways to express our life's energy that would contribute something useful to our Planet – maybe even help save it from the doom that seemed to be lurking just around the corner.

"One crisp autumn day, several of us participated in an inventive and amazingly powerful game. Its purpose was to help each of the guys there rise above his limited beliefs and habits and discover new ways to assert his higher self. Our guide explained the ancient tradition of 'running-the- gauntlet' – you know, where a bunch of men form a tunnel of abuse, and the initiate had to make his way through it while being hit (or worse!) by everyone.

"Today, though, we were going to try a new variation as a way of strengthening our commitments as Earth Stewards. We were each to take a turn firmly holding an 'Earth Ball' – a soft, stuffed pillow looking like our planet and meant to represent our commitment to serving the Earth. Holding this tender 'Earth' in our arms, we had to make our way through an imposing corridor of brothers who mostly were trying to keep us from moving forward. While the actual distance to be traveled was only about 15 feet, we were each confronted with a mass of sixteen tough men physically blocking our way. And

even worse, taunting words were thrown at us from all sides to demoralize us.

"Now this may sound strange, Chris, but along with all this abuse, every once in a while someone would put out some loving, supportive encouragement! The idea was to make this trial feel sort of like the way life usually feels – sometimes supportive, sometimes seeming to block your way.

"So, somehow or another each of us had to find our own unique way of running-the-gauntlet. Those who attempted to use brute force soon found out that they were no match for sixteen strong men determined to block them. In addition, when we utilized our tried-and-true tricks of 'being nice' or some other form of subtle manipulation, the others would ruthlessly taunt us with the impotence of these methods. And despair was useless too, for not to succeed was to be condemned to endless taunts, separation from the brotherhood, and worse, failure in our mission to carry the Planet to safety.

"I was the last person in my group to run-the-gauntlet, and I had ample time to observe each of my potential strategies be tried by someone else. Each met with utter failure. I could feel panic welling up inside – there was no way I could complete this ritual! Yet not to do so was unthinkable.

"As my turn grew closer, a vision began to form deep within, a light which, if followed, offered the possibility of leading me through this seemingly impossible task. Its instructions were terrifyingly simple: go naked and focus only on your goal. Naked of strategy, naked of manipulation, and, oh yes – not a stitch of clothing! I tried to bargain with this inner-vision for a while, but as the second-to-last person was in mid-gauntlet, I surrendered. From that moment on, each

movement occurred perfectly, and when heads all turned to the beginning of the line once more, there stood one clothed only in his pure intention, one armed only with his vision.

"I can't tell you what happened during the next few minutes, Chris, for in some way 'I' wasn't there. I still have vague memories of bodies blocking my way, of crude taunts aimed at undoing me. But 'I' wasn't there to receive them. There was 'nobody home' – just a willing Earth-servant focused 100% on bringing the Planet through to safety. Later, bruises and reports from my warrior-brothers proved that I did indeed have to struggle to move through. But my only experience – all I can remember – was following my inner vision and knowing with full certainty that the mission would be successful.

"As I completed the gauntlet and passed on my stewardship of the sacred Earth Ball, I was bathed in an awesome sense of the power and peace that naturally flowed from surrendering my will and following the directions of my inner Guide."

Grandpa Dave pauses for awhile and looks over to see how Chris is taking all this. Deep in thought, it takes Chris a few moments to realize that Grandpa Dave has stopped talking and is waiting for him to say something. But before he can open his mouth, Grandpa Dave is looking at him sternly and mockingly saying, "Now mind you, Chris, I don't want to hear of you strippin' naked here on the block and trying that with these ruffians. That was a unique situation, and my inner vision gave me a unique answer to my problem then."

Chris' face shows that he understands. "Yeah, I see what you mean. So you're telling me that if I've got a problem I just can't seem to figure out, then maybe I could see if I've

got this inner vision thing inside and try doing what it shows me to do, right?"

Grandpa Dave nods rhythmically, gradually coming in tune with the motion of the swing. "Yep," he finally says, "I'm sure you've got it. After all, you're my grandson, ain't ya? The trick, though, is to really want to serve some noble cause real bad. Then, somehow, what to do just reveals itself inside your head. 'Course sometimes folks don't like what they see, but then again, if you're sincere, you generally get a good doorch. Catching himself just in time, he hears Chris' disappearing figure shout, "Thanks, Grandpa. You're the greatest!"

Well now, muses Grandpa Dave to himself, that's real sweet. But he knows that the real praise belongs to his lifelong Friend, the Spirit within which recently has begun appearing with incredibly gorgeous multi-colored wings and delights him with awe and wonder as It flutters through the flowers of his mind.se of courage along with the vision."

Comforted and renewed, Chris springs off the swing, nearly toppling Grandpa Dave onto the porch. Catching himself just in time, he hears Chris' disappearing figure shout, "Thanks, Grandpa. You're the greatest!"

Well now, muses Grandpa Dave to himself, that's real sweet. But he knows that the real praise belongs to his lifelong Friend, the Spirit within which recently has begun appearing with incredibly gorgeous multi-colored wings and delights him with awe and wonder as It flutters through the flowers of his mind.

— Author anonymous

Chapter Twenty

The Good Heart

by Sogyal Rinpoche

The kind of birth we will have in the next life is determined by the nature of our actions in this one. And it is important never to forget that the effect of our actions depends entirely upon the intention or *motivation* behind them, and not upon their scale.

At the time of Buddha, there lived an old beggar woman called "*Relying on Joy.*" She used to watch the kings, princes, and people making offerings to Buddha and his disciples, and there was nothing she would have liked more than to be able to do the same. So she went out begging, but at the end of a whole day all she had was one small coin. She took it to the oil merchant to try to buy some oil. He told her that she could not possibly buy anything with so little. But when he heard that she wanted it to make an offering to Buddha, he took pity on her and gave her the oil she wanted.

She took it to the monastery, where she lit a lamp. She placed it before Buddha, and made this wish: "I have nothing to offer but this tiny lamp. But through this offering, in the future may I be blessed with the lamp of wisdom. May I free

all beings from their darkness. May I purify all their obscurations, and lead them to enlightenment."

That night the oil in all the other lamps went out. But the beggar woman's lamp was still burning at dawn, when Buddha's disciple Maudgalyayana came to collect all the lamps. When he saw that one was still alight, full of oil and with a new wick, he thought, "There's no reason why this lamp should still be burning in the daytime," and he tried to blow it out. But it kept on burning. He tried to snuff it out with his fingers, but it stayed alight. He tried to smother it with his robe, but still it burned on.

The Buddha had been watching all along, and said, "Maudgalyayana, do you want to put out that lamp? You cannot. You could not even move it, let alone put it out. If you were to pour the water from all the oceans over this lamp, it still wouldn't go out. The water in all the rivers and lakes of the world could not extinguish it. Why not? Because this lamp was offered with devotion, and with purity of heart and mind. And that motivation has made it of tremendous benefit."

When Buddha had said this, the beggar woman approached him, and he made a prophecy that in the future she would become a perfect buddha, called "*Light of the Lamp*."

So it is our motivation, good or bad, that determines the fruit of our actions.

From The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying

Chapter Twenty One

Benjamin Franklin's Thoughts on Death

Dr. Franklin, a scientist of international renown, also believed in Reincarnation, of which he wrote:

"When I see nothing annihilated (in the works of God) and not a drop of water wasted, I cannot suspect the annihilation of souls, or believe that He will suffer the daily waste of millions of minds ready made that now exist, and put Himself to the continual trouble of making new ones. Thus, finding myself to exist in the world, I believe I shall, in some shape or other, always exist; and, with all the inconveniences human life is liable to, I shall not object to a new edition of mine, hoping, however, that the errata of the last may be corrected."

At the age of twenty-two, he wrote his own epitaph, "the most famous of American epitaphs:"

The Body of B. Franklin, Printer,
Like the Cover of an Old Book,
Its Contents Torn Out And Stripped
of its Lettering and Gilding,
Lies Here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be Lost
For it Will, as He Believed,
Appear Once More In a New
and more Elegant Edition
Revised and Corrected
By the Author.

And at the seasoned age of seventy-four, taking a long look into the as-yet-unturned pages of history, Ben Franklin wrote to Joseph Priestley, the discoverer of oxygen, as follows:

"It is impossible to imagine the height to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the power of man over matter. We may perhaps learn to deprive large masses of their gravity, and give them absolute levity, for the sake of easy transport. Agriculture may diminish its labor and double its produce; all diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting even that of old age, and our lives lengthened at

pleasure even beyond the antediluvian standard. 0 that moral science were in as fair a way of improvement, that men would cease to be wolves to one another, and that human beings would at length learn what they now improperly call humanity."

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Benjamin Franklin was an advanced soul; he brought in with him Awareness. Because of this special quality, he perfectly understood the illusion of what we term "living," and the reality of the greater life that we call "death." His Awareness is exemplified in the letter that he wrote to Miss Hubbard on the occasion of the death of his brother, John Franklin:

PHILADELPHIA, 23dFebruary, 1756.

I condole with you. We have lost a most dear and valuable relation. But it is the will of God and nature that these mortal bodies be laid aside when the soul is to enter into real life. This is rather an embryo state, a preparation for living. A man is not completely born until he be dead. Why, then, should we grieve that a new child is born among the immortals, a new member added to their happy society?

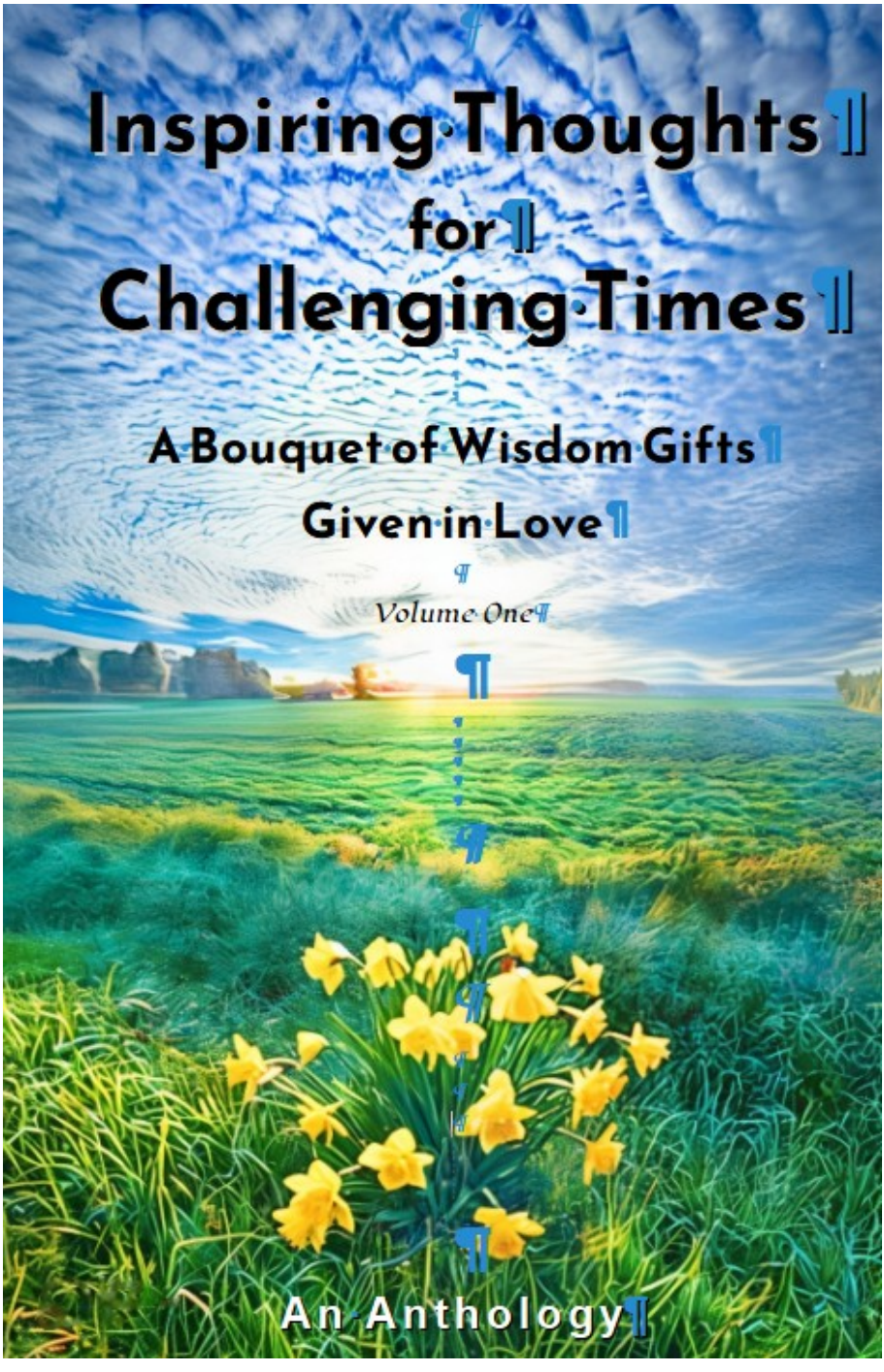
We are spirits. That bodies should be lent us while they can afford us pleasure, assist us in acquiring knowledge, or in doing good to our fellow-creatures, is a kind and benevolent act of God. When they become unfit for these purposes and

afford us pain instead of pleasure, instead of an aid become an encumbrance, and answer none of the intentions for which they were given, it is equally kind and benevolent that a way is provided by which we may get rid of them. Death is that way.

We ourselves, in some cases, prudently choose a partial death. A mangled, painful limb which cannot be restored we willingly cut off. He who plucks out a tooth parts with it freely, since the pain goes with it; and he who quits the whole body parts at once with all pains and possibilities of pains and diseases which it was liable to or capable of making him suffer.

Our friend and we were invited abroad on a party of pleasure which is to last forever; His chair was ready first and he is gone before us. We could not all conveniently start together, and why should you and I be grieved at this, since we are soon to follow and know where to find him? Adieu,

B .FRANKLIN


Inspiring Thoughts
for
Challenging Times
A Bouquet of Wisdom Gifts
Given in Love
Volume One
An Anthology

Epilogue

Inspiring Thoughts for Challenging Times

A Bouquet of Wisdom Gifts Given in Love

In these challenging times, many of us find comfort and support in the inspiring teachings of the wise ones from all times and places. Having collected and been uplifted by such writings for over three decades now, I recently I felt moved to put together a collection of quotes—short supportive reminders to empower our highest vision for ourselves, humanity and Mother Earth—it's cover is on the previous page.

This book is freely available as a PDF download from archive.org (insert title between " " in the search box) and from play.Google.com/books. In addition, both paperback and hardcover editions are available at minimum cost from Amazon.com.

I hope you will find this love offering inspiring and uplifting on your life journey. I do not receive any financial compensation from this book, only the joy of seeing its *Inspiring Thoughts* made available to the many thousands of souls eager for its uplifting messages for humanity at this critical time. A few of these quotes follow:

We need beauty because it makes us long to be worthy of it.

— Mary Oliver

In every crisis there is a message. Crises are nature's way of forcing change, breaking down old structures, shaking loose negative habits so that something new and better can take their place.

— Susan L. Taylor

The future depends entirely on what each of us does every day; a movement is only people moving.

— Gloria Steinem

The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it.

— Henri J.M. Nouwen

Spirituality is not religion. It is a path for us to generate happiness, understanding, and love, so we can live deeply each moment of our life. Having a spiritual dimension in our lives does not mean escaping life or dwelling in a place of bliss outside this world, but discovering ways to handle life's difficulties and generate peace, joy, and happiness right where we are, on this beautiful planet.

— Thich Nhat Hanh
The Art of Living

Whatever is impelling us is rooted in a mystery.… Something new is being shaped that began before time itself was formed. We're not causing it to happen. We're letting it happen in us.

— William Martin
The Activist's Tao Te Ching

The things that matter most are the things that you can't see—the love you share with others, your inner purpose, your comfort with who you are.

— Jimmy Carter

May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.

— Nelson Mandela

Hope is a state of mind, not of the world. Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously heading for success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not because it stands a chance to succeed.

— Vaclav Havel, in James Conlon
Lyrics for Re-Creation

Over the years I have seen the power of taking an unconditional relationship to life. Perhaps the wisdom lies in engaging the life you have been given as fully and courageously as possible and not letting go until you find the unknown blessing that is in everything.

— Rachel Naomi Remen
My Grandfather's Blessings

The people I love the best jump into work head first. I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart, who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience, who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward, who do what has to be done, again and again. The work of the world is common as mud. But the thing worth doing well done has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident. The pitcher cries for water to carry, and a person for work that is real.

— Marge Piercy

Gratitude is giving ourselves over to shifting our fundamental belief from thinking we're owed things in life to a sense that everything is a gift.

— Christine Valters Paintner

You're braver than you believe,
And stronger than you seem,
And smarter than you think.
Christopher Robin to Pooh